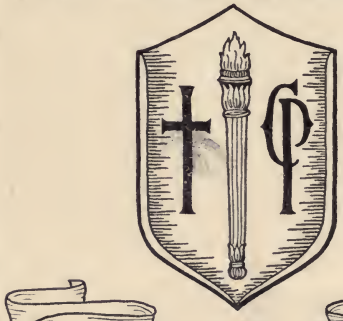
Mountain Man

by

VERNE BRIGHT

COLLEGE
OF THE PACIFIC



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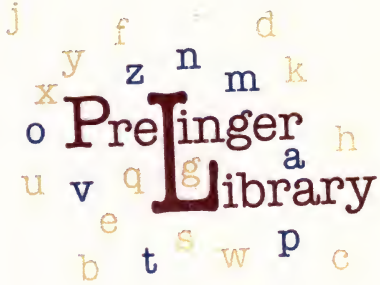

San Francisco, California
2006

For
Dr. R. D. Hunt
with every good wish from
the publishers.

H. H. Tipson

Caldwell, Idaho
July 12, 1949

VERNE BRIGHT, Northwest poet, who has been represented in more than thirty anthologies of poetry, was born in Brookfield, Missouri. He was left an orphan at the age of eleven years. Following his graduation from high school he joined the army in 1917, visiting Hawaii, Philippines, and Siberia with the A.E.F. In 1925 he was graduated from Pacific University at Forest Grove, Oregon, and a few years later took graduate work in writing from the University of Oregon.

He has worked on newspapers as reporter and editor, was an assistant postmaster at Aloha, Oregon, and in 1936-42 was state editor of the Oregon Writers' Project. During all this time he has continued with his writing and has had over 1200 poems published in various publications in the United States, and in foreign countries.

Verne Bright spent three years of intensive research on the narrative poem *Mountain Man*, reading and studying over three hundred books of history, Americana, and biography to obtain the background material.

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MOUNTAIN MAN

Stockton, Calif.

Mountain Man

By

Verne Bright

LIMITED EDITION

THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.
Caldwell, Idaho
1948

This first printing of MOUNTAIN MAN is an edition limited to 500 signed and numbered copies of which this is copy Number 467.

Verne Bright

R. H. Hunt.

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CALDWELL, IDAHO

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Printed and bound in the United States of America by
The CAXTON PRINTERS, Ltd.
Caldwell, Idaho
56235

48-22859

To

LAURENCE PRATT

Who from the beginning, with his advice
and encouragement, has shared in this
undertaking.

Thanks are due the *North American Review*, *Frontier and Midland*, and *Better Verse*, for permission to reprint certain portions of this poem that first appeared in their pages.

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MOUNTAIN MAN

PRELUDE FOR DANIEL BOONE

Daniel Boone on the Femme Osage
Built a wildwood hermitage
To fend him in his ancient age
From devious folk of street and town:
From broadcloth coat and taffeta gown;
From *bons vivants* and social tricks,
Tinsel trappings and politics;
From gold in hand and curious neighbors,
Hard hearts warped by endless labors....
Mid uncleared acres he built his house
Under a beech grove's friendly boughs
And sat him down for a time of dream.

The haunted mirth of a woodland stream
At his dooryard edge was a fiddle tune
Played at twilight under the moon:
This is the singing fiddle's theme,
This is the dream of Daniel Boone....

Wagons west, like ships full sail,
Creak and rumble on the river trail,
Tramp of men and bull teams' thunder,
Conestogas piled with plunder,
Children laughing and women singing,
Herdboys shouting and mule bells ringing!

"New land! New land!" he hears the cry,
"Beyond the sunset, beyond the sky!"

"Beaver! Beaver!" the dusk air quivers,
"Where the mountains rise by the westmost rivers!"
"Gold! Gold!" the belling tongue
Rings out. . . .
He listens. . . .
No longer young,
He keeps his place by his own doorstone.
Missouri . . . Missouri . . . old . . . alone. . . .
The mist comes up, the cold winds shiver
And scud on the river. . . .

The dream smoked out, the caravan
Was lost in the dusk-heart, gray and wan,
And night curved in like a grave's lost place . . . .
Then . . . burning before the westing race,
Pioneer. . . .
His dream went black,
His soul sought out the zodiac. . . .
Westward the star. . . . Old Dan Boone,
Scouting the sky with the hunter's moon.

THE DREAM IS SWIFT

Jefferson Boone leaned on his squirrel gun,
Looking on the brown, earth-troubled water:
Missouri's water, born where the westering sun
Treads deathward; where the Shining Mountains scatter
A froth of frenzied billows, and tempests batter
The granite shores of time, secret to man
Undark of skin since ever the world began.

Bright dreams of youth! Beyond the river gates,
Free-footed in the regions of the deer
And bear, he ran, coursing with strong mates
Among the frosty mountains starry sheer;
The Indian war cry's swift obsidian spear
Beat at his heart's stockade. . . . O venturous ones,
Mighty of spirit beyond the alien suns!

Under the sycamores
Jeff stood where the yellow river crumbled its shores.
The flame of living, the hot blood's desire,
A sudden April fire,
Ran through his veins.
After the winter's frosts, the leafy rains
Of last year's forests crackled beneath his feet.
The caravans of wild fowl overhead
Arrowy sped,
Heckling the wake of winter in full retreat.
The wild bees from the hive
Of century-hollowed oak
Blew like a smoke

Across the early sun. . . .
He saw the partridge with her younglings run,
Most glad to be alive,
He heard a blackbird in the red haw sing,
And the tanager, swift wing
Of flame; he smelled the wild flowers' dewy blow—
The blackthorn's fragrant snow,
The small wood violet and the columbine,
Like incense of old wine;
And like winged violets blue butterflies,
The souls of flowers, dazzled on his eyes. . . .

The wilderness gods call to the tameless heart;
Wildfire eyes peer from the darkened cave
Of being; gadfly longings flit and dart,
Goading the spirit. . . .
Hark! Across the wave
A riant song: a spear of laughter drave
To the flesh of fear; the body's rhythmic breath
Shouted in the glowering face of death.

Behind my cabin's a little lake,
(*Rouli, roulant,*
Roulant ma boule)
With two white ducks and a silver drake,
(*En roulant ma boule*).

The hunter comes with his rifle gun,
(*Rouli, roulant,*
Roulant ma boule)
He kills my drake, my silver one,
(*En roulant ma boule*).

His feathers are on the wind like snows,
(*Rouli, roulant,*
Roulant ma boule)
A golden maiden gathering goes,
(*En roulant ma boule*).

Within the forest a bed she'll heap,
(*Rouli, roulant,*
Roulant ma boule)
For two to kiss, for two to sleep,
(*En roulant ma boule*).

Boat horns drowned the chanson's lingering wail
As up the bank the towmen trundled slow,
Hauling at the taut cordelles; the bellied sail
Hummed in the upstream wind; the thrusting row
Of pikemen boomed in chorus: "Yo heave O!"
The steersman's eyes searched out the murky tide
For snags, like clutching hands from the riverside.

"Hello, the boat!" Jeff called.
"Hello, the shore!"
"Where ye from?"
"San Louie!"
"Where ye bound?"
A singing mist of silver running before
Adventurous feet, the answer: "The mountains round
The great falls of Missou', and the Indian ground
Beyond the Yellowstone."
"What is your lade?"
"Foofaraw and guns for the beaver trade."

The boats crept on into the sunset flame;
The voyageurs' songs were whelmed in the evening
hush

Like voices lost in sleep; the darkness came
And sifted its sable snow on tree and bush
And hissed in the copper flood; with a crystal rush
The stars leapt into the sky; and the April moon
Over the hickories danced its slow rigadoon.

Up from the honey-dropping woods of spring
Jefferson Boone walked back to the Femme Osage,
Musing in the quiet night: the argent sting
Of dream in his heart—the golden heritage
Of deathless race to eke a meager wage
Of humdrum life. . . . Breaking through his dream
Beyond the night he heard a panther scream.

Then in the dusk he saw, or seemed to see,
Washed in moonsilt, wild things of the wood
In slow procession: the red stag running free,
The doe and dappled fawn, the myriad brood
Of fox, wolf, coyote, waking the solitude
With tonguing tumult. . . .He heard the wind's intone;
The strident clash of water over stone.

The scene dimmed out, but for a moment lingered
A fragile light, and in its center strode
A tall familiar form—lithe-foot, swift-fingered—
Clutching a rifle gun. (The moonlight sowed
Its grain and reaped its harvest.) Then the road
Lay empty. . .yet the night wind seemed to croon
Into his ears the name of Boone—Dan Boone.

America is moving west,
(This is the song of the wind)
America is moving west,
Boone, Dan Boone leads on the quest,
A white spear riding the battle crest—
Sang the wind.

Crowding from the Old World towns,
(This is the song of the wind)
Crowding from the Old World towns,
Felling the forests, breaking the downs,
Strong men and old men, wise men and clowns—
Sang the wind.

"Westward!" their unending cry,
(This is the song of the wind)
"Westward!" their unending cry;
To the red man, "Way, give way or die!"
They spread like a cloud mist darkening the sky—
Sang the wind.

The sun comes riding from the east,
(This is the song of the wind)
The sun comes riding from the east,
Over the Alleghenies' crest,
And dies beyond the crimson west—
Sang the wind.

Mount and ride with the setting sun,
(This is the song of the wind)
Mount and ride with the setting sun,
Horse and dog and rifle gun,
Follow the trail of Daniel Boone—
Sang the wind.

The West-song was a whiplash in his brain
As he stumbled on through night's immensity.
Desire cut through his heart with the trenchant pain
Of a two-edged knife: the urgent memory
Of upstream boatmen—the wind-waywardly
Tossed laughter of a girl's love-eager mouth,
Wave-undulant as waters seeking south.

Unbid, an old tune came upon his lips:
"Go to Jane Glover"—his thought was another name—
"And say I love her". . . . Like storm-shaken ships
The words danced on night's sea. Out of darkness came
The wandering music, a slow wind of flame
Sinking on the dark. . . . "By the light of the moon,
Lonely and loving, I will come to her soon!"

Someone leaned upon the pasture bars
By Matt Byrne's cabin. . . . Before his vision gleamed
One only face: the light of drifting stars
Glowed in her eyes, a mystic moonfire streamed
Translucent from her brow, a fragrance dreamed
Along the dusk—the perfume of her hair
Scenting the coolness of the evening air.

HUNGRY HEART

Earth-music awake in the dusk,
Moon in the thorn-flower trees,
Love was—and is—and love is not
Less than these:
A fire of dream in the eyes
Of night, and the ghostly faring
Of feet on the hillways of laughter,
Splendidly daring
The arrowy lances of stars—
Death's avatars.

The farmer's golden daughter
Runs to the evening wood;
Beyond the clover meadow
She is lost in the solitude.
A nighthawk cries above her,
Like a cataract he falls:
Is it totem of a dark lover,
Or death that appals
The heart? Ah, well,
Time will tell!

Shadow of pain in the twilight,
The thornberry vines twine a bar
Against the moon and the foxfire light
Of the evening star.
She hears the wind in the branches
Whispering eagerly:

The wind and the waters mock her,
And the haw flowers: she
Is waiting for. . .
Whom? Wait and see!

The harsh foot of one in the twilight
Bruises the lily blossom;
Treads on her heart, on her dreams,
Presses her bosom
Secret with pain's delight. . . .
The trail dips over the creek
Into the nebulous dark:
Lone wanderer, what do you seek?
Wait! All is well!
Hush and hark!

Daughter of the moon! he sings,
Love is a cabin's shelter
In the tangled bryony,
The silver-throated welter
And music of children's laughter,
The glowworm's transient fire
Tremulant under night's rafter;
Death's insatiate desire. . . .
Has he no more to say?
Listen: Love today!

The farmer's golden daughter
Dreams by the clover meadow. . . .
Will he stay? Will he pass?
The whispering wind in the shadow
Pauses in the grass,
And the water in its flowing. . . .
The ghosts of fear surround her.

Hush again, he is going!
No! the haw flower says,
He has come. . . he has found her!

Heavy with light, the slow wind of afternoon
Drifted across the fields, bearing scent of clover
And fresh-plowed earth, waking a fragile tune
Mingled of flower and feather and water over
The mill weir by the creek. A golden plover
Cried on a snake-fence rail. Beyond the mill
Clouds foamed against the summit of Darst Hill.

Margaret Byrne looked from her father's house,
Her eyes deep blue as light of iris flowers
By the cool watersprings: the whitethorn boughs
Trembled with goldfinch bells: the serried hours
Marched westward, swinging slow: the swaying towers
Of hickory cast long shadows. . . . Her heart grew light
With the contagion of the spring's delight.

Along the forest trace to Hidden Water,
Beside the plowlands green with sprouting wheat,
She went a singing way, the broken fetter
Of winter shaken from her heart, the fleet
Wings of laughter brushing her lips with the sweet
Pulse of life's warm kiss: the budded maples
Scattered the waning light in golden dapples.

Nested in the shadows of the ferns
Under the whitethorn brambles, with open eyes
She lay. The sky arched over like a hern's
Blue-feathered pride: swift arrowy dragonflies
Dartled above her: the wind with little cries
Breathed at her ears: she crushed her trembling breast
To earth, whose urge was love made manifest.

The April flame stirred in her as a coal
Is blown to crimson life and set to the wick
Of a tallow dip, waking the passionate soul
Of beauty. Her dark smoldering blood grew quick
With the sweet of the world: over her bent the thick
Branches of blossomed song. . . . O flower of the sun,
Spring lives forever and love is never done!

From the swayed branches bloomed a tremulant
fluting,
And all the trees were quick with blossom-fire,
And all the blossoms bore a clamorous fruiting,
Pied as the curved bright sunbow of desire:
Blackbird, catbird, finch—a strident choir;
Redbird, vireo—a luminous throng
Poured out their hearts in swift tumultuous song.

"Redbird, little redbird," she cried,
"Oh, you have wandered afar, awide;
Sing-a-sing in my thornberry tree;
Oh, who will woo and wed with me?"
"A fine-pretty lad!" sang the redbird.

"Oh, who will hunt the wild deer of my heart
Over mountain and valley with swift silver dart?
Oh, who will bring me a soft furry shoe
To buskin my feet from the wet of the dew?"
"A strong-lusty lad!" sang the redbird.

"Oh, who will build me a wee cabin-house
Under the sweet maple's red-rosy boughs?
Who'll crown with blossoms my sun-golden head,
Dance me and kiss me and take me to bed?"
"A love-lonesome lad!" sang the redbird.

Margaret Byrne walked home through the leaf-green
wood,
Her hands abrim with violets that bees
Curved over, the warm-fingered solitude
Atug at her heart; the doves in the sweet gum trees
Wooing her heart with wilding melodies.
Somewhere far off she heard a broadaxe clang,
A deer hound belling: somewhere water sang.

An aspen wind went running up Darst Hill,
Nuzzling among the leaves. Pete Journey's cow
Was a gold flame in the sunset. A whippoorwill
Burned in the wild crab apple with a slow
Insistent spark of song. The moon, somehow,
Was a glowworm crawling on the world's rim:
The path grew perilous silver, dewy dim.

The voices of the dusk sang in her ears:
"Margaret," they said, "lonely and loving,
Look you for a one that all the years
Will cherish you in heart, homeward from roving,
The woodland's hands unloosed, the water's moving
Lips breath-silenced? Hush! He is not far,
Shadowed in the silence of a star."

She leaned on the pasture bars; the scent of clover
Breathed of mystery; the silent wood
Loomed sinister and strangely dark above her;
The meadow was a hazy silver flood.
Sudden a song cut through the solitude.
. . . . The tune died on the darkness. A foot stepped
On the packed trail; night waited: the wind slept.

They met beside the gate to the clover meadows:
The night was an infinite high-ceilinged room
Tenanted by specter-gaunt huge shadows,
The immeasurable silence of still gloom
Broken only by the tender bloom
Of the moon. The evening star, white and alone
Against the west, a firefly lanthorn, shone.

They stood silent a space, her cornsilk hair
Bright as a cloud. Below them in the dusk
A tiny creature chirred. The dew-cool air
Was spiderwebbed with mist. The scent of musk
Spilled from the pawpaw groves. The outused husk
Of day spread at their feet. A thrush sang far. . . .
They wished together on the evening star.

"Starlight, star bright, first star I see tonight;
Wish I may, wish I might. . . ."

Margaret laughed: "If wishes could come true
What would you wish?" "Happen I'd wish," he said,
"That a fine gypsen-kit of a girl like you
And a no-count brash of a lad like me should wed."
Her heart was a dancing tune; she perked her head,
Her eyes like sparkled water. The thrush grew still:
Venus' star sank slow beyond Darst Hill.

The night touched her with wonder: small fireflies
Twinkled the dark; she cooled her flushing face
In the fresh breeze, searching along the skies
For words of answer to his wish. The place
Was immanent with magic for a space
Of taken breath, then: "Would you have me?" Low
He spoke. The stars ticked over slow and slow.

Her blood was all a tumult, but she said,
With half a laugh to hide her quavery words:
"Why is a wild lad wanting a girl to wed
When he's wed to a rifle gun, and sorts with the birds,
And liefer than keeping himself to housen and herds
Goes traipsing the forest places?"
"Happen I'd bring
To a bride a poke full of love and a luck-penny ring;

"A bed of fern-flower-feathers and a house with walls
Of waverin' sweetbrier for a wed-night's sleep;
A dripsin' gourd of liquor from the waterfalls
For a lovern's pledge. . . . Stone-built walls can keep
Ye safe from varment-things (the sudden leap
Of panther and wolf-cat) when the Dog Star shines—
But can they keep ye love when love's heart dwines?

"Ginst winter I'll hew logs on the white-oak ridge
And build a cabin'd-house for a bride's home place
In a grove of birchen down to Coon Crick's edge,
And clear us a farm out yan by Boone's Lick trace. . . .
Beaver skins'll buy ye a gown of lace,
And Rose o' Sharon kivers from old Kate's loom,
A split-wood cradle, and a witch-hazel broom.

"And I can raise us corn in Coon Crick's bottom,"
His voice was eager, "If'n ye wed with me;
I can pluck us possom-grapes in autumn,
And wild-bee honey out'n a holler tree. . . . "
"And did I wed a loose-foot, gone, maybe,
Stravaging gin a year wise folks'd pity. . . . "
"The way of the gray wild goose is the way of beauty!"

"But loving you is the fine-prettiest thing I know;
Happen you love me I'll wed with you, Jefferson
Boone. . . ."
"Happen I love ye? Does the bee love the apple blow?
Is there love in the fiddler's heart for the fiddle tune?
Happen I love ye? Has the chit-child love for the
moon?
Does eve-gloam dew love the flower things? As God
He hears,
I will be loving ye that-a-way all of my years!"

His words dropped whist, and off in the farmstead
barns
Cowbells tonkled low: the bay of a hound
Startled an owl's thin hoot, like a voice that warns
Of things afeared. Unheedful of the sound
Awesome with portent, his strong arms twined her
round:
He kissed her mouth . . . time waited . . . hearts content,
Home through the moonlight hand in hand they went.

THE GRAY WILD GOOSE

His mind ateem with visions, he went to bed,
But not to sleep: he stared into the dark,
Thinking of eyes of luminous laughter, sped
Light from stellar space, the scintillant spark
Of Vega . . . his dream transmuted to a lark
Singing in the silver night, giving to peace
The cry of pain in his heart and love's unease.

Through the loft's slim window the stars looked in;
And all the forest was a place of ghosts:
The cricket tuned his lonely violin;
The night was haunted by the brooding hosts
Of beauty, moonlight-ferried from the coasts
Of Elfan, bearing in their hands the urn
Heaped with the honeyed meal from love's bright
quern.

So opiate in waking dream he lay:
The loft was dark, but everywhere around
He seemed to see a light but not of day;
He seemed to hear a voice, but less of sound
Than silence whispered to him; in astound
He saw . . . he listened . . . in a golden place
A wind of music, a starlighted face.

She is the chime of many leaves
When April blossoms summer;
The tremulant ruby-hearted flame
That burns the throat of the hummer. . . .

Haw flowers on the hawthorn tree
(Wind, blow softly, blow!)
Her hands will weave a bridal wreath
Of blossom-snow.

She is a reed of arrowy light,
Swift from the bow of the sky,
Barbed with the hot sting of love:
A stricken creature, I. . . .
Wind, blow over the hawthorn tree,
Scatter the blossoms down—
Her hands will weave the petal silk
For a bridal gown.

She is the haw flower in the wind,
The hum-bird's throat of red;
She is an arrow to the heart of death:
She is a bride for a man to wed . . .
The black haws on the thorn tree hang
Like jet beads in a row—
A jeweled comb for a bride to wear—
Blow wind, softly blow!

Lovely it was, her memory in the loft,
That stirred his heart's blood like a heady wine. . . .
Then:
winds tapped at his window, calling soft,
Waking that other dream: the dying shine
Of the moon crept on the floor, the sweet woodbine
Scented the night. He sat up, staring out
Of the westward window. . . .
As if at a faint far shout
He cocked his ear: was that a boat horn's cry
That flowed like a ghostly music to his hearing?
"*Rouli, roulant, roulant ma boule!*" (The sky

Was rent by a falling star like an arrow spearing
The body of the dark.) Was that the cheering
Swift song of voyageurs, a-low, aloud?
The moon went out beyond the horizon's cloud.

Uneasiness took his heart as Margaret
Again stood in his dream, for a lad's bride-girl
Will not rest long forgotten. The compass-set
Of his mind was all awry; his brain awhirl
'Twixt need of outland going and the skirl
Of love in his heart. His quick thoughts seethed like
yeast
Till the bird of morning chirmed along the east.

He stamped into his boots and went outdoors;
His feet turned in the trail to Matt Byrne's place. . . .
He told himself a thing: "Life's to think on 'fore's
Too late. What's done and by's a milltail's race
Skelping among the rocks: the treddaned space
Of a man's trail's short this side the grave: the ground
Is a darksome house to sleep in once you're bound
By the whang of death.
Happen afore I wed
Mebbe it's better I go the walkable ways
A ration of time. When love, it takes ye to bed
It keeps ye to housen and hold its lengthin of days.
Out yan is the mountains: out yan is the unknowen
maze
Of the ocean-sea, I've heer'd. . . ." Bird shadows fleeted
Across the trail. A foot stepped: a voice greeted.

"Morning to ye, young mister!" Golden, the voice
Warmed him with its cheer. "Here's news from
Heaven,

Fresh from the Eden tree: let earth rejoice,
The Lord, he sends his servant for a leaven
To the tribes of men: wake from the night's black
sweven,
Make light the unknowen ways: That God may bless
Ye, blow your trumpet in the wilderness."

Jeff stared amazed. "And who are you?" he said,
"Stravaging this-away?" The stranger, gleed
By the question, smiled and slowly shook his head
In mocking censure: "Johnny Appleseed
From Ohio lands," his laugh was a spirit freed,
"Walking the woodways, flocking with birds and bees,
Bringing my news fresh from Heaven and my apple
trees.

"Westing I roam, asowing the earth with fruit
For those who will come after, by valley and hill.
When Johnny Appleseed is a broken flute
His trees will bear regardless; their blowth will fill
The spring with sweet-o'-love; their harvests spill
Gold in the autumn grass. . . . Happen the sun
Will lead me to West Sea afore my work is done.

"Look ye, young mister," Johnny's arm stretched out,
Its shadow huge on the grass, "yon where the day
Goes to the dark of death with a dwining shout,
Where Oregon River is lost in the salten spray,
Over the Shining Mountains, the Indians say,
Is a land that's ever a-green and pranked with flowers,
And the round of the year is a flitter of April hours."

"The Shining Mountains!" Jeff harkened to the words
Singing in his ears. "I aim to go
Out yan, happen I might." The wing-bright birds

Stung the air with color. . . . "Well-a-now,
Reckon I'll be getting on; the wind's a-blow
Out of the wester lands." John turned his face
Against the morning wind up Boone's Lick trace.

Jeff watched him as he went till the forest hid
The wandery figure in its darksome ways,
Honing for the open lands: "If'n I did
Go yan, what's to hender? Peg'd wait till the days
Of my going is past." The new sun's slanted rays
Poured promise in his eyes. "Happen I wed,
My trumley foot-loose time'll be over and sped."

Margaret was in the dog-run, setting crocks
Against Matt's coming with the milk; the sun
Showered her hair with light. The scatterwit flocks
Of ducks spooned at the leftments. Eyes full of fun,
She watched them. . . . Jeff leaned on his rifle gun
And whistled a dance tune: "If'n ye aim to keep
Your heart a-happy better ye sing a heap."

Margaret came from the stoop along the path;
The morning wind played wistly with her dress.
"How you?" Jeff greeted . . . "Tell it not in Gath
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Gaily, I thank you! Happen you've come, I guess,
To borrow fire so early with the dew
Still on the grass?"
"I've come aseeking you."

"What have you brung me that you come aseeking?
A fine-pretty present against our wedding eve?"

"Happen it's that: a present in sort of speaking:
But mebbe not what'll please ye. If'n I leave

Ye loning the space of a time it takes for to weave
The greenings of April again, would it tickle your
ears?"

"If'n you leave?" she whispered, her eyes big with
fears.

"Just for a sprinkle of weather: one of these days
We'll get us married. . . ." (Margaret darted, "Do
tell!")
"But first, I reckon I got to go my ways.
Something's amoiling my blood," (a sort of spell
Was on his saying, low as an eve-gloam bell)
"Mazing my head: I seen the ark-boats goin'
Upriver yestere'en for the Yellowstone.

"Happen I was coming back along the trace
I seen old gran'ther Boone as plain as light
With his long rifle gun; I seen his face,
And he was smiling-like. The moon was bright
In a little slash, amaking the haw flowers white
As carden wool. He seemed to say. 'Jeff Boone,
Look to the West!' His voice was a singing tune.

"Over yan's the mountains," Jeff said again,
"Way out's where I aim to go. I hone to see
Strange cur'us places. Out there beyant the plain,
I've hearen tell, John Colter said a tree
He seen was made of stone. He said that he
Seen rivers biling hot, and brimstun showers,
And pieded pools like morning-glory flowers,
And mountains of black glass. . . ."
Margaret stood
Heavy of heart, but to hide her hurt she toyed
With his dreams, and answered him in laughing mood:

"When-all you setting foot?" Her words deployed
Like skirmishers. "And happen you've enjoyed
Itself a length of time you'll be coming back
Like a lost dog following out his last year's track."

"When days aplenty have wended I guess, mebbe,
I'll content me then for to settle down
Like I said yest'eve."
" 'Pears like to me
You're granting yourself a heap. Nought but a clown
Could take a girl's kiss and leave her to hone
Her heart outen her breast ere a day is sped. . . .
I think I could hate you, Jefferson Boone!" she said.

For a little space they stood empty of words,
Watching the minutes pass; then Margaret:
"You talk of loving and wedding, then liken the birds
Go flittering to unknowen where. . . ."
"A body can't set
All of his days in a spot. Times I forget
I'm a man-person borned and reckon I'm cousin-
kinned
To the piedy lonesome water and the wandery wind."

"Get you gone with your kinfolks!" Her voice was
proud.
"I can make out, I reckon, as women have done
A-since long ever ago." The dark of a cloud
Drifted a misling curtain over the sun. . . .

"Moon in the night sky shining, honey, my hon!"

Out of the thick of the woods a gay song spurtled;
The bluffs hallooed it back, as a dark man hurtled
The snake fence by the trail.

"Hallo!" he cried,
"How you?" Peg answered him: "Well as otherwise,
Rube Herring. Set and rest."
"Spell-charmed to bide
Here-all a bit. . . . How Jeff?" A spear of ice
Was in his voice, "Fair day!"
"A biddable size
Of cloud is hiding the sun!" Jeff answered slow,
His brow a-scowl: "D'ye reckon it'll snow?"

"If'n the wind junes north'ards, happen it might!"
Rube turned to Margaret: "Old Nathan Bray,
He's giving a frolic-dance come Sattiday night:
I'd plumb admire to carry ye there. What say?"
Her eyes gleamed cold blue fire, then ashed to gray:
She looked at Jeff and tilted her honey-bright head
In prideful sort: "Surely, Rube Herring!" she said.

BOONE COUNTY FROLIC

Through the last glow of afternoon they came
By twos and threes and dozens: Busbys, Trants,
Afoot, ahorse, in the sunset's amber flame—
Men in hunting shirts and deerskin pants,
Women in linsey dresses, gay for the dance;
David Darst with his basswood fiddle and bow,
Dan Boone's black boy, Derry, with his old banjo;

Limpy Pearce, leg-shot in Tecumseh's war;
Flanders Callaway, riding his rawboned roan,
Jemima up behind with a Blazing Star
Coverlet for a pillion; Sam Redstone,
Fresh from the Shining Mountains, his rifle gun
In his elbow's crook; dark voyageurs from the river,
Their voices eager with the bright word "Beaver!"

The sun set, the moon rose, Dave took his place
With Derry and his banjo: buck-and-wing,
Jig, scamperdown, and reel, in headlong race
Of music, flowed like rivers when the spring
Has filled the land with rain: *The Western King,*
Boone County Frolic, The Outlaw and the Girl,
Turkey Bone Buzzer . . . in a golden whirl.

The dance . . . the wild wood-throated music,
The feet that move to the old tune:
You are a riffle of stone-troubled water
Tonight . . . under the moon.

The eager-footed forest shadows
Swirl to the fiddle's cry,
To the banjo's twang: tonight love,
The stars in the sky!

Margaret Byrne, Margaret Byrne,
Stars for dreams wherever you turn,
Margaret Byrne!

The dance . . . the rushlights in rude sconces
Radiant, the primal mirth
Of forest boys and girls rises
Like dewsmoke from the earth.
The coonskin, hickory-knot, of a man
Pounds the floor with cowhide feet:
His smile is thin as a knife in sheath.
Tonight, the stars . . . love . . . sweet!

Reuben Herring, Reuben Herring,
Soon the devil will get his fairing,
Reuben Herring!

The dance . . . tonight, oh, you are music
Maddening as fire in the brain;
You are wind on the scaurs of granite—
Heart of joy, heart of pain!
Lift the gourd, lip the wine of rapture,
Drink to love, to hate's dark clan:
Love . . . the dance . . . O body's beauty,
Tonight . . . in death's black caravan!

Jefferson Boone, Jefferson Boone,
The earth grows old too soon . . . too soon . . .
Jefferson Boone!

Jefferson Boone, from the cabin door,
Watched the dancers on the puncheon floor,
Gripped his brass-bound squirrel rifle
With hooked hawk hands unused to trifle
With proper game; the fiddle's wail
Was a panther crouched on a forest trail.
The shuffle of moccasined feet beat a tune
Of portent into his brain; the white moon
From its perch in the sky, like a white owl, peered
Through the sycamore trees where the torches leered
Like gnomes in the dark.
He saw, he heard
Margaret Byrne, her voice of a bird,
Her hair like cornsilk under the sun,
Her eyes aglint like waters that run
In the white-birch grove when April is warm
To the new-sown seed on the creek-bottom farm,
Her linsey skirts like a grapevine curled
About her limbs of a gypsy . . . Skirled
The music swifter; the free-heart laughter
Fluttered its wings at the dusty rafter.
Flushed of face and flashing limbed,
Joy of life and beauty brimmed
Her heart: all colors of love and dream
Lurked in the golden rushlight gleam,
All the surge of love's despair
Flamed from the foxfire of her hair.
Jealousy was a shadowed fist
Poised above her; a graying mist
Entangling her feet, as winter-furled
Frosts smoke in the forest, whirled
By winds of hate. . . .
Mind vexed and strange,
Jeff watched the dancers cross and change:
Swing your partner, circle to the right,

Won't get home till the morning light!
He heard the men of Femme Osage,
Men of St. Charles and Charette, engage
In banter with wood runners from the Lick
And pigeon hunters from Pigeon Creek:
"What's the word from old San Lou'?"
"The Vide Poche gals—" "Old Sam Blue,
Saw him once on the Gasconade,
Trapping and making a heap of trade
From the Sauks with beads and frumpery—"
"I'd dose him good with sassafras tea—"
"*Moi,* by gar, one tam I saw
On Purgatoire a Shian squaw,
Enfant de garce, elle était belle—"
"Hugh Glass once on the Musselshell
He fout a b'ar—" The tales went round,
Freighted with wonder to astound
The hearers: "Kit Carson had a duel
On Siskadee with a Nor'west fool,
And dropped him cold; 'twere an Injun gal
From the 'Rapahoes—" "Injuns! Hell
'S full of Injuns!"
Hugo Coles
Pounded the floor with his rawhide soles,
Over the tumult, with a voice like Bashan's
Bull, called the dancers to their stations,
Ranged the couples and called the turns:
Joab Wynne from the Jim Creek burns,
Jeremy Pinch and Red Mike Flynn,
James Gaunt, elder, and James, the younger,
Swayed to the notes of the violin,
Beat the boards to the banjo's clangor;
With Mary Brady and Martha Challow,
And Cherry LeMoyne from Frenchman's Hollow.
And there were rivermen, lithe and swart:

Jean Choteau and Pierre LeMort,
Dupré St. Clair, ready for fun,
Light of heart, and quick to anger
As the gleaming flint of a rifle gun.
Blades from the hills in doeskin shirts,
Beaded and flounced like the dress of a girl;
Horsemen flourishing buckskin quirts,
Joined in the music-maddened whirl.

Mush-a-ring-a-ring-a-rah,
Whack fol-de-dady O!
Come swing your lady O!
Thar's whisky in the jug.
Swing Sally, swing Lucy,
We'll meet you by and by:
Hound dog barking up a sycamore tree,
Racoon climbing high!

Juba . . . Juba . . .
Hear the fiddle sing;
Banjo thrumming, rafters humming,
Dancers in a ring:
Buffalo girls from Arkansaw,
Corn-fed girls from old Missou',
Heel and toe, around you go,
Swing your lady-Lu!

All hands round the whisky jug,
Thump that floor awhile;
Bear cub sliding on a slick-ellum tree
In good old-fashioned style;
Bumblebees in a hickory stump
Buzzing a rancy tune:
Buffalo gals, can't you come out tonight
To dance by the light of the moon?

Hear the lads ashouting,
Hear the girls sing:
Tomcat on the fence rail,
Pussy in the ring. . . .
We'll dance the stars out of the sky;
Hugo, call the tune:
Oh, buffalo gals, can't you come out tonight
To dance by the light of the moon?

FIRE IN THE FLINT

From tune to tune old Dave and Derry shunted:
First a lonesome slow repeating piece
That mourned like misling winds or spirits hunted
Through a nightmare dream; then in a swift release
The music rushed like water; then like bees
Humming over flowers it drifted slow,
Soft as evefall, sweet as honeyflow.

Margaret's feet were light: in flings and reels
She cut the short dog fine—the tunes rilled out:
Ballad pieces, square fours. . . . Cracking his heels,
Rube Herring stepped a jig that brought a shout
From the old ones hunkered down three deep about
The cabin walls. The dust motes glowed among
The dancers like a visionary song.

The whisky jug perched, peart, upon the hob,
Brimming with amber liquor newly drawn
From Jotham Trenchard's still. Like a bedlam mob
The frolickers pranced and shuffled; the swift din
Of feet and fiddle fast and faster ran,
Unmindful of the hour: the banjo twanged
The scamperdown: *When Big Harpe, He Were Hanged.*

With a burning hate searing his brain, Jeff stood
Aloof, his eyes like flint in the rushlight glow.
Margaret rollicked by in giddy mood
Clinging to Reuben's hand. As at a blow

Jeff winced. Then: "Sashay, swing your partners, ho!"
Old Hugo called the turn. Rube and the girl
Flung themselves into the dizzy whirl.

Furtively Rube's lips brushed on her hair:
The hot blood swept Jeff's face; pent devils lurked
Behind his eyes. Rube leered. Hate teetered there
Between them. Margaret laughed and lightly perked
Her head, awatching each. Sudden Jeff jerked
A tongs from the fireboard; Rube's sheath knife
gleamed
Like a silver of quick fire where the rushlights
streamed.

"Boys, outen!" Nate Boone's voice broke through the
spell
That held the folk afeared. "Such goings-on
Ain't fitten for womern's eyes. Outen!"
"Hell!"
Rube Herring swore, "I'll fight him, knife or gun."
Then Jeff: "Rock Tavern 'gin tomorrow's sun.
Happen ye'll bring your rifle." Feet held slow,
Nightward he moved into the moon's white glow.

A fire burned world's edge, the wakening birds
Stammered goldenly, as Jefferson Boone
Fronted Rube Herring where the broken sherds
Of Tavern Rock strewed earth. Far off a loon,
With a phantom cry, broke silence. The late moon,
Shipwise, sailed to harbor. A wind sprang up—
The dawn wind, bearing life as in a cup.

But death crept evilly among the stones
Though life poured on warm lips, though keen desire
Surged in the blood....

Like posts the rifle guns
Stood planted at each foot till the swift word, "Fire!"
Released the sentient spring. Two points of dire
Flame leaped to a meeting: quick breath flinched:
Eye grappled eye in hatred: hard teeth clenched.

A crimson stain of blood grew on Jeff's cheek;
Rube searched his breast with horny fingers. Again
The ramrods tamped hard lead eager to seek
The vital furrow to the hearts of men.
But as his stick went home Rube Herring's span
Dwindled to nothingness. . . . Then someone said:
"Rube's hit . . . right through the heart. . . . By God,
he's dead!"

Then Nathan Boone spoke slowly: "Jeff, what's done
Is done all-ever. It ain't nary use
Ye lingering here-a-by. Sheriff's bound to run
Ye into San Louie jail, happen the news
Of what's to do has set his feet to cruise
The trails in these-abouts. Far and awide
Beyant our homeplace, happen ye'd best abide
A spell of time. . . ."
"I reckon that's sartinty.
Beza Clark ain't letting his moccasins grow
With moss, 'tain't like," Sam Redstone said. "Now me,
I'm heading up Missoury. If'n ye go
Cootering along of me a year or so
This-all will thin away and be forgot
Quick as snow in a chinook, liker than not.

"This child's half froze for the trail. Come, put her
there,
And we'll be getting on."

"I can't go lest
I've talk with Margaret Byrne."
"Let be! As far
As I can squint, ye've seed her enough to rest
Ye a right smart scant of days. This coon heads west
Short of an hour. *Sauve qui peut!*" he said.
Jeff's thoughts were millstones whirring in his head.

"It's better ye prance," said Nate Boone. "Beza Clark,
He'll hunt ye like a fall buck 'gin ye stay. . . .
I'm giving ye Dad's old gun. Now look ye, hark!
It's done a mort of killing in its day,
But all its killing was honest, so to say,
In fair fight, mind ye: happen ye keep it free
Of tainted blood. . . . Do ye hark, now, Jeff?" said he.

"Dan set a heap of store by that there gun,"
Sam Redstone dreamed old trails. "A-yes-siree!
It's made a mort of skulking redskins run
Afore your time, young mister. Once, by gee!
On Kaintuck River, Dan'l says, says he:
'Injuns is Injuns, but, hark'ee, guns is guns
That'll take and keep this Westland for our sons,
And our sons' sons, clean out to the ocean-sea.'

"He said that . . . and I reckon he was right.
A-first Kaintuck, Ohio, and then Missou',
And next comes Rocky Mountains . . . If'n a fight
Or two's to pay, what's odds? Afore we're through
Oregon and Californy, too,
The lot of 'em, will heir to us, from Kaw
To the River of the West. . . . that is the law!"

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

UPRIVER MEN

The new sun rose in a gold flow of light,
Dissolving the shine of stars in the wine of dawn,
Routing the tree-dark, routing the shadows of night
From the face of the waters momently slate-colored,
gone
In a slow swirl-mist; umbrantly, one by one,
Birds from the shore reeds whirred, their swift wings
sounding
As numerous drums, their querulous cries rebounding
Resonant from the bluffs: the dew-shrill air
Smelled of returning spring and leaves newborn. . . .

Upriver the pole-thrust urged; the cordelles, where
The taut wind caught them, sang; white flashed the
torn
Spume foaming at the bows; the patron's horn
Swift on the windlift drifted bright on the crest
Of quick airs eastward flowing: and the sun sped west.

"Oh, Shannydore, I love your daughter,
Away-ay my rolling river.
I'll take her across yan rushing water,
Oh-hey,
We're bound away
Across the wide Missoura!

Oh, Shannydore, she took my fancy,
Away-ay my rolling river.

Oh, Shannydore, I love your Nancy,
Oh-hey,
We're bound away
Across the wide Missoura!

Oh, Shannydore, I'll ne'er forget her,
Away-ay my rolling river.
Till the day I die I'll love her ever,
Oh-hey,
We're bound away
Across the wide Missoura!

All day, prodded by April, led by the sun,
The boatmen, slow, with sail, cordelle, and oar,
Fought the yellow waters—loosed snows a-run
From the prisons of frost through the secret, stone-fettered door
Of the mountains (fate-faring); breasted the pour
Of the mingled floods out of new lands, blended
In a wide water track. . . . And the day ended,
The last sun on the sail.

Perched on his pack,
Dreaming, Jefferson Boone gazed on the west,
Behind him the camp light burning, before him the track
Of the spent day on the river; spangling the crest
Of night, the constellations, like jewels on the breast
Of a dark-skin girl, burned in his eyes. In the starlight
Jeff watched the swirling waters bearing the far light
Of worlds, and wondered, and heard the waters talking.

As for their words, these:

"Jefferson Boone,
The sun has set on the pathways of your old walking,
And darkness is there, but the stars and the ring-round
moon
Light a new trail for your feet, the west waves croon
Another song for your ears. Love is a husk
Dry in the teeth, shattered by hate's black tusk.

"This is the end of time and the first of time:
All undiscovered is the land you face,
Peopled by men of dream; not reason or rhyme
Can say what people are there that make of that place
A land afeared, a dark and furious race
Accursed of the Lord; warring, unkind, at odds
With pale-browed folk: their gods are different gods.

"Look to the sky, Jeff Boone, look to the stars
And the moon's rime-silver making a path for your
feet.
Your heart that carried love now carries the scars
Of hate's swift spear. . . . Your heart that was April-
sweet
As a new-flowered field, now is cold with the sleet
And gaunt with winter dearth . . . Afar in the night
The Shining Mountains wait, white peace in the
starlight."

So did he dream by the river and hark to the waters
Until sleep's unremembrance, easer of hearts,
Weaver of peace, burier of pain's black slaughters. . . .

Again the sun on the waters showers its darts,
Boat horns bray departure, the wild chanson starts

Water birds from the reeds: westward the wind
Urges the keelboat, far the farmlands behind. . . .

So did they sail, so did they breast the river,
Heart-eager for the wild lands, day by day,
Out from the Femme Osage, the gold word "beaver"
A song in their ears. By Devil's Gate the way
Rock-toothed, a wild beast slavering for prey:
Sandspit and shoal were there, and herons going,
And the prairie smell in the nostrils with the west wind
blowing.

Anon, their gunwales low, swift ark-boats came,
Laden with plunder from the Yellowstone,
Homing like paunch-fed birds, the slender flame
Of spume flung from their oars. . . . anon, alone,
His comrades murdered and his peltry gone,
A voyageur fleeing the fur land with a curse,
Fear in his heart, of death . . . or perhaps worse.

Three weeks from the Femme Osage a mackinaw,
Wave-battered, undermanned, moved to the tide.
Sam Redstone spoke its patron: "Bill, hurraw!
Old coon, what's Injun sign?" Old Williams cried:
"And do ye hear now, Sam, brown skin's aride
Platte River way. The Rees are running, too,
And cutting the water trail up old Missou'.

"When we were acoming by the river towns
The redskins used us *some* now, do ye hear?
Rubbed out six of me lads. *Valgame!* down's
'Em slick as bear's grease. Well, they did, I swear!
One, two thousand Injuns. Saved my hair
By the skin of a nigger's heel. Wa-agh! Hell's full
Of Rees. Now hark'ee, Sam, ye'd better pull

"Ashore this side the Towns and hit the plains.
The Rees'll make ye wolf's meat, that I'll lay.
Take hoss and pack at Kaw mouth if ye've brains."
Sam answered: "Reckon my stick floats that-away."
"Well, so long, old hoss!" Bill laughed. Away
Downriver dwined the boat; Sam clicked his jaw
And turned his prow to the waters of the Kaw.

The Kanza Indians and the keelboat traded
To Rubidoux for mustangs and sleek mules,
Northwest they rode. Behind, the forest faded
To smoke on the horizon. In spangled pools
Of light, flowers decked the prairies. A ship of fools
Sailing on unknown seas, they seemed, the turf
Asway in the wind, a dumb, inaudible surf.

Sun at back, the kindling mornings found them
A-journey from cold campfires. The warm noon
Of April sank to May; the prairies round them
Faded to ochre, adumbrating June
With brilliant brush stroke; the white full-shield moon
Shone over the dark plain. The coyotes' clamors
Beat on the firelit night with strident hammers.

The days grew weeks as, stream by stream, they
marched,
Leaving remembered lands: the rivers known
And loved of old: to find new rivers arched
By skies of a strange splendor, by tremulous-blown
And walking sandhills, by still deserts sown
With arrowed death: the Blue Earth and the Loup
On the perilous trail of the Pawnee and the Sioux.

And these the men who rode with Jefferson Boone:
Sam Redstone, hickory-hard, six feet of man;

Jed Williams from the Lick; Batiste Le Jeune,
Voyageur without peer, and Vide Poche men,
A ten or twelve; Jeff's cousin, Gallatin;
Gay Rob Sinclair, and big Juan Marceline,
Mitchell and Markhead, homebound for the Green.

The blinding sun of June poured light where waited
Silence in the bare land sharp with eyes
Of dark-skinned men. High, lonely buzzards, sated
With carrion feast, curved on cloud-empty skies.
Sudden a rider, dark above a rise
Of grama poised a moment, then the ground
Sprouted with feathered horsemen. In astound
The caravan halted.

"Howgh-owgh!" the riders came,
Wailing like a raucous wind of storm
Across the edge of sky, swift as a flame
In the dry prairie grass: a malevolent swarm
Of hornets with stings of death. Sam Redstone, firm
As the granite of his name, cried: "Boys, hold tight,
You're dead men if ye run. It's stand and fight.

"Cache in that buffler waller!" Old Le Jeune
Swore: "*Enfant de garce, les Loups* Pawnee!
Dose Hinjun ride lak hal. Eh, *mon vieux,* Boone,
Bon place dis wan for mak de good fight, *oui!*
By gar, ve mak 'em come!" "Wagh, boy, by gee!"
Sam said to Jeff, "It's ten to one, but, hell,
I've been in worse scrapes. Let the niggers yell."

Into the shallow pit the trappers flung,
Stripped gear and saddles from the horses' backs,
(Grim portents in the air the buzzards hung)
With long knives gouged the earth behind the packs.

A war horse dropped, heart-shot. Sharp rifle cracks
Startled the going day. "Wait!" Redstone cried,
"Make every shot count coup!"

Hugely astride,
He stood to give the word. The prairies whirled
With painted warriors. "Steady!" Arrows hissed
With venomed bite. "Now!" Stormy war cries skirled
From savage throats. Hot leaden pellets kissed
Flesh with the kiss of death. Wild stallions missed
The guiding hand. Men swore. The sun stood west,
Unmoving a spear's length over the prairie's crest.

At each timed volley from the forted band
The surgent Pawnees fled to come again,
With sharp hooves beating the sun-brittle sand
To foam of dust, like spume on rock, and then
Like spent waves driven back: but living men
Were in that wave that broke on living rock—
The crested flood recoiled from the hard shock.

Jeff, rising for a true shot, felt quick fire
Across his brow, the salt blood wet his lips.
A pack mule screamed. A stricken brazen wire
Twanged in Jeff's brain. The lash of torturing whips
Seared on his cringing flesh. As evening slips
To night he slipped into the dark; the roar
And rush of battle troubled him no more.

Jefferson Boone woke from a nightmare sleep,
Felt for the moss-chinked logs of his homeplace;
His eyes searched out his window, pale to the peep
Of day's adventure; but his puzzled gaze
Met only gaze of stars. He heard the race
Of water over stone. Mysterious pain
Held him to earth, clutched at his dizzy brain.

He grappled life once more. A raveled thread
Of dreams linked body to reality.
He would get up. He raised his throbbing head
A tortured inch. Again night, like a sea,
Flowed round him, whelming in vacuity
The sentient fire—the scarce rekindled spark
Lost in the great abysm of the dark.

The night passed and the day and evening came
To a sage hen's drumming. . . . Once more Jefferson
Boone
Sought trail to the land of men: the familiar flame
Of the camp light warmed his heart, the friendly croon
Of the camp pot soothed his ears with its hunger tune.
Under his drowse he heard the slow intone
Of windy trees; the deep insistent drone
Of subdued voices.

Lazily he lay
And pondered what and wherefore. His thoughts ran
Laden with old dreams—old dreams that lay,
A burden on his heart. A little span
His brooding conciousness groped out the plan
Of half-forgotten time—the shadowy years
Long lost, but found again.

As one who hears
A tune remembered he turned aside his head.
A tall man leaned above an iron pot
Ringed round with dancing light.
"Oh, Sam!" he said,
His voice a valiant whisper; slow he fought
The darkness from his brain. The old man caught
The faint articulation of his name;
He turned, tree-shadow-tall against the flame.

"Harraw, Bill! Do'ee hear? He's coming round,
Sure as guns has hind sights. Rob, by gee!
The Old Bear's left him loose." With heart abound
Jeff listened to the words. *"Vraiment? Ah, oui!"*
Old Batiste stuttered, *"C'est bon chance!"* A-glee
He fluttered like a sage hen with one chick.
"Water!" Jeff sighed. Then Sam: "Here! Water,
quick!"

So life came back: the world took shape again
And lay, a long trail waiting for his feet.
Westward, at long last, freed of his pain,
He followed the sun. The heart in his hot breast fleet
To the new world beyond the plain. How life was
sweet
After the uttermost dark!
Sam Redstone spoke
Words on this wise, as they rode, and his words were
a cloak
To hide his heart:
"Well, Jeff, old coon," he said,
"The Injuns mought nigh got ye that time, Wagh!
Well they did. And when ye dropped down dead,
They made more medicine. And then we saw
'Em turn again, a hell-bent riding flaw
Of stormwind sleeting death. Two Vide Poche men
Were rubbed out that time 'fore they broke again,
Leaving three niggers crows' meat.
It war nigh
On sundown and we'd counted twenty coups
On Pawnee bark." He ceased. Then, by and by:
"They'd got their bellies full of fighting, too,
That spree. This child remembers, fall of dew
Came on, and the nighthawk's zoom. We lifted hair,
Loaded our traps, and went away from there."

The unknown earth was before them and the plains,
A tilted table leading to the light
Of drifting suns, lost to the coolth of rains,
The color of rock golden and brown midst the white
Of alkaline snow: and the going waters were bright
As bronze, bank-fringed with cottonwood and plum:
And the shadows of crows were there, and the
pheasant's drum.

West with the wind they went in the barren land:
The mountains first like a smoke of lifted cloud
On the horizon, thin as the dust of sand,
Edging the tilted plain; a tenuous scud
Ever increasing, barring the rising road
Each dawn with taller shadow, till the sky
A-west was quarter-blotted from the eye.

Dawn, and the mountains like a granite door
Denying them passage: cragged slopes on either side
The upgoing way: the canyon's ragged floor
Tumbled with stone! "Yan is our way!" Sam cried,
His long gaunt finger reaching where a wide
Notch cut the serrate ridge, between the crests
Of heaven-assaulting, cloud-built Everests.

All day the mountains challenged, the harsh way
Climbing the great wall under the wheeling hawks;
At noon climbing; and at the going day,
Feet on the naked screes, the color of rocks
Hot on the eyes, climbing; and wild-goat flocks
Were in that place; and night and the copper flare
Of camp flame in the wind, and the moon's white stare.

At morning-lift a great gulf under heaven
Spread; the smoke stood west. Jeff climbed above
The abysmal world. As in a dream's deep sweven
The eagles curved far down; the gaunt pines strove
With whistling winds. He saw slim waters move
Perpetual from steep stone through valley breaks,
And beyond the valley rise yet other peaks.

Silver under the sun three icy towers
Spread fantastically along the sky,
Tremulant-glowing as immortal flowers
In the garden of the Lord; a song grown high
Forever—visible music in the eye
Of time: on world's edge with supernal gleam
Beckoned the Shining Mountains of his dream.

"A fine-pretty world," Jeff mused, "happen a man
Gets chance to see his see." A moccasin pressed
The granite at his side, shale slithered. "Yan
Is a man's own country, lad," Sam Redstone guessed,
"Or this child wouldn't say so. There we rest
The winter out and trap. There's beaver land."
And the valley lay in the shadow of his hand.

The sunlight was hot surf awash on stones.
They marched down by steep footways where the day
Stood lost in tree-dark hollows. The dry bones
Of mountains dust to their feet. With evening they
Came into that vast valley ground where lay
A lake among its reeds, the waters calling
With voices under the dusk, and the keen night falling.

There, the plains behind and the bitter deeds,
They paused in that land, setting their ready snares.
A blessed land, great with a mortal's needs:
Swift antelope and clumsy, ambulant bears,
Fat buffalo, sleek-bodied elk—rich wares
Spread out on nature's counter: to procure,
A rifle's leaden coin, an aim heart-sure.

So did they, in that valley, rear a house
Log-built and ample: summer being dead,
And the plums ripe in the thickets, and the browse
Of deer lush in the meadows, and the mountain's head
Hoary with new snow, the huge sun red
With smoke in the dusking sky: so did they lift
Strong walls against the winter's boding drift.

Now, when the geese honked south and blackbirds
came
In sooty storm, and the scared partridge whirr
Was loud in the forest glades, and the autumn flame
Of cottonwood was a lucent harbinger
Of winter's avalanche, the traps reaped fur
In abundant harvest till the fur lofts held
A Croesus ransom, a sun-golden yield.

And this was so. . . . And life was sweet on the mouth
For the space of a singing dream; then days went dark
In the great sky, and the running scud drove south,
Harried by wind's hounds running, the sun's mark
Erased from the scroll of day. Now was the barque
Of time wrecked on dim shores. The ancient weird
Of death stalked through the world, a thing afeared.

Or so it seemed! The wood lay deep with snow,
White in the glades, steel-blue in the shadow of trees,
Ashes of autumn's fires adrift in the blow
Of winds, when dawn with its frail argosies

Trailed on the eastward peaks cold mockeries
Of summer's interlude. Then men stood mazed
At a world gone strange in a night.

Old Batiste gazed
From the cabin door and talked of long ago:
"*Moi,* by gar, oh, ten, twent' year, maybe,
Long tam I leeve up Nor'land ware de snow
She's deep lak one beeg house, *vraiment! ah, oui!*
She's deep lak steeple, deep lak one spruce tree,
Enfant de garce! One night *un* carcajou
Ees come for Zhoe Zharvay. *Oui, sacré dieu!*"

So in that season when the world was whist
In sleep, the moon a pale and wandering ghost
In the sky's silent country, and the mist
Bannered the granite peaks, and violent host
Of winds assailed strong walls, gargantuan boast
Surged from rum-loosed throats to fill the night
With peopled wonder for the ears' delight.

"I mind me," so the tale, " 'twere twenty-three
Or thereabouts when Ashley's hundred went
Missoury way and fout the blasted Ree:
Gave 'em Green River. Major Henry sent
A brigade to the Grovans helter-bent
To trap and trade. Talbeau and Carpenter
And Fink were there that spree areaping fur.

"Hell were froze that winter sartin tight,
Or this child wouldn't say so. Well, sir, wagh!
The ice were three feet, plumb! And then one night
Carpenter fout with Fink about a squaw,
And whopped him, too, pretty's ye ever saw. . . .
Them were the days, me lads." He paused and then:
"They've all gone under now, them pretty men.

"Black Harris, he were there, and he could lie
Faster'n a mule can run. He were the child
That saw stone trees and water biling high
As a mountain up to Eustis. Wagh! it riled
His dander if'n ye didn't believe him. Wild
He were: he'd squint his eyes and bore ye through
And say: 'Me b'y, me tales air always thrue.' "

"And there were folks yan to the Spanish Peaks:
Munchies they were, and Injuns, but plumb white
As you or me. I've seen 'em. Lost for weeks
One spree down yan, wagh! I'd not et a bite
'Cept roots and berries for a mort. One night
I clumb a clift and next morn what I saw
Were whoppin' strange, or this child are a squaw.

"The mountain drapped straight to a valley more
'N a thousand feet, and shining in the sun
Were a city's roofs and steeples. Ye could floor
Me with a buffler's beller, or my gun
Shoots crooked. 'Food!' I thinks, and I begun
To hunt a down-way, hoping for to gain
That pretty town a-yander on the plain.

"But 'twere no use. And then the Munchies came
To clift foot, white they were, and jabbered some
Outlandish lingo, shaking their spears. Their game
Were not for this old beaver, so I come
Away from there damn pronto, I did, plumb!
And 'tweren't a day afore I'd found a deer
Wolf-killed, but hell, meat's meat, now do'ee hear?"

And so the nights went, golden with spun yarns:
A warp of things seen with a weft of dream!
The shadow of death by waters of hidden tarns,

The laughter of love where blue eyes met the gleam
Of black in Taos town. . . .
The strepent scream
Of a panther split the dark. "*Ah, le bon dieu!*"
Old Batiste swore: "Eet ees damn carcajou
Avec dat Zhoe Zharvay, *mais je suis sur,*
Enfant de garce!"
"Well, Frenchie, spill the tale.
Who was this 'Zhoe Zharvay'? What beast that you're
So feared on? Float your stick and show your trail
Or cache your fixin's." Out dark the rising gale
Plucked at the latch thong with chill spirit hands
Like ghosts of dread lost from the underlands.

And then Batiste:

"*Un beau garçon*
Dat Zhoe, *ah, oui!* De sweet *chanson*
He mak en voyage. En *la guerre*
Avec dose Hinjun he no care
One damn for *les sauvages,* by gar,
Hees knife she's lift de Hinjun's ha'r,
Or *moi,* Batiste, I *non pas* say
Eet, *non. En autrefois* he's gay,
Dat Zhoe. He's shoot de carabine
Plumb centair, *oui,* ah verra fine
He's ride de *cheval,* and hees squaw
La plus belle from Trois Fourches to Kaw. . . .
He's un ver' *beau* gran' *montagne* man.

"*Mais il est mort, m'en dit.* Oh, tan,
Twelf year, long tam, maybe he's die
En Grovan fight. . . . *Mais, non!* Now, I,
Batiste, will tell of Zhoe Zharvay. . . .

"One wintair snow she's gone, (*c'est vrai*)
An' fall lak hal two, three, four week.
De win' she blow, de ice she's theeck,
Mon sacré bleu! dose Cabanne creek
She's lak de stone.
One night *mon père*
He's see eet first, *avec* de glare
Of green eyes on de dark, *ah, oui!*
An' nex' day *vraiment, mon père* see
De beeg track on de snow, de gran'
Feetprint. De carcajou, she ran
On Cabanne rivair. Den *mon père*
He's trail heem, find heem. Lak un bear
Dose hanimal, *avec* de *tête*
D'un wolf, by dam, *un sauvage bête.*
On trouve en montagnes no huntair
Si fort, si brave lak dat *mon père.*
He's queeck lak panther an' he's shoot
Dose carabine centair, ver' goot.
Mais carcajou, she's not care, *non,*
She's honly stand dere on de snow
Dose beeg mout' drippin' fire, so!
Mon dieu! avec terrible yell
Lak *un diable* on de hell
She's turn an' run on de *forêt.*

"An' den she's come mos' every day
An' lak de spirit wolf she's go,
Un fantôme bête, ovair de snow.
All tam she's howl more loud, dey say,
Dan nort' win' when she blow.

"Dose Hinjun, when dey hear dat cry,
Dey ver' mooch scare, dey shut de heye
An' theenk, *diable,* she ees near.

Dey say dat long tam en de year
Of falling star beeg Manitou
Curse dees damn wolf, dees carcajou.
On dit, dose *bête,* one tam she's chief
Of Hinjun people. Dirty t'ief
He's steal fire from de blessed flame.
Mon dieu sacré! Dat chief, he's name
Black Wolf. Dose Hinjun say when col'
She's on de land an' moon, she's roll
Ovair de sky, dose *bête* she's seem
Lak hellhound running in de dream.

"One tam dat Zhoe Zharvay, he say:
"*Je ne craigne pas, dose bête!*" *Ah, vrai,*
Dat Zhoe *trop brave; 'vec* carabine
He go. *Sacré,* dat Zhoe, he's shine
Een hunt, by gar! He's beeg lak tree
An' strong lak buffalo, *ah, oui!*
Hees squaw she's cry. . . . But Zhoe, *par bleu!*
He's keel dat goddamn carcajou.
De snow she's theeck smoke on de air,
De win' she's blow lak hal an' tear
De beeg limb hoff de tree. He's fight
Dat snow, dat Zhoe, an' say: 'Fore night
Moi, I come back, ha! *toute de suite!*

"*Mais, 'vec la nuit* hees stompin' feet;
Nous ne pas hear. De storm she's blow
Long tam. By'm-by she's stop. De snow
She's deep and white undair de tree.
Mais Zhoe, he's no come: one, two, three
Days, maybe. Den old trappairs cry:
'*Vraiment,* dat Zhoe Zharvey, he's die!'
Dat Hinjun medicine man, he's tol'
Dose stories till de blood she's col',

An pound hees drum. Zhoe's squaw, she yell
Lak cayeute. Den dos Hinjun tell
Dat Zhoe Zharvay he no come back;
He's foller all tam black wolf track,
Nous ne pas find dat Zhoe Zharvey.

"De days, weeks, months go, an' de sun
She's warm de flowers: den de snow
She's white again. Dat carcajou,
Mon père he say, once more she's run,
She's mout' lak fire, an' mak de yell.
Mon père he say, dat *bête* hof hal
And dat brave Zhoe ees still run by
En forêt on dat Cabanne stream,
Lak snowdrif' blowing on de sky,
Or runner on de dream."

He ended. All approved the horrific tale.
"Wagh!" Bill Mitchell swore. "That ain't no lie.
This coon remembers, once on Spanish Trail
Me and Joe Meek, we fout one damn well nigh
Three hours. Hark'ee now! and did he die?
I'm gut-shot if'n he did. Two pounds of lead
We spilled into his carcase: 'nough to dead
A hundred Injuns.
Wagh! He'd spit 'em out
As fast as we could shoot, now, dang my hide!
And grinned atop a rock. He did so-o!" Doubt
Laughed in his hearers' eyes. Old Bill, astride
The hearth flame, waxed with eloquence, and vied
With the storm wind's orchestration. "Well, now, we
Fout demon-beast that weather, yes sirree!

"When we'd make camp to roast meat, do'ee hear?
That carcajou came whoppin' on us, damn

My eyes! and screeching hell for sartin. Near
Froze this child's blood. And do'ee hark'ee, Sam?
He wolfs that meat right off the spit. A ram,
By Godfrey! slick it were as y'ever see. . . .
I tell'ee, lads, my heart were small that spree."

Then Markhead, like a rhymester of old time,
Took up the harp and twanged its tuneful strings,
Filling the cabin with the rhythmic chime
Of storied words. As the cupbearer brings
Wine to the thirsting minstrel boy who sings
Before the gods in Nibelung, Jeff brought
The rum cup brimming: so was the good tale wrought.

"These are true things I saw of which I tell . . .
Three pilgrims were we on the road to hell,
Eating the dust of dreams: Jake Silverthorne,
Bill Wolfskill, and this child were taking morn
With the sting of wind on our mouth, asetting traps
In likely rivers; drinking at running paps
Of mountains; eating the earth's sweet-tasting flesh.
I recollect 'twere April, and the fresh
Grass were agreening the hollers: day and night
Flew over us like geese in north'ard flight.
Jake Silverthorne, he said, 'Mark, do'ee hear?
Yan to the northern buttes, the beaver's there.
My stick floats that-away!' We turned our mules
To the northland and the burnt hills. Dreaming fools!

"This coon's set trap from Knife to Santa Fee,
From coasts of Platte to the California sea,
Well, I have. I recollect me now,
As a gangling boy fresh from the furrowing plow
I came into this country: Yellowstone

Were a cub of a crick, these mountains were half-grown
Sand hills, and the trees were sapling trees.
I've fout the blasted Blackfoot and the Rees,
And raised me plenty crop of Shian hair.
Rattlesnakes I've et: and a grizzly bear
I've rassled afore now. I've seen the sky
Rain fire, I have, and this child wouldn't lie.
And I have seen stone country. . . .
"Mighty strange
It were: 'yand Timpanagos and the range
Of Stonies stretching south. The fur were thick
Where we were trapping up a dwindling crick
That flows from the Paiutahs. It were prime:
Seven dollars the plew if 'twere a dime.
We did our possible. Then hills went dry
As spring dwined into June, June to July.
Slow-moving devil birds gloomed on the sky:
Leaves shriveled and, I mind me, wind-whipped dust
Were like a snow—our beards were white with frost
Of drifted sand.
"We clumb a range and crossed
To a hard-bitten land. The Injuns there
Were small and scrawny, with big eyes astare
Like owl eyes in the dark. 'Twere none as knowed
That country in our band. There were no road
To tell us which way: and rank water stood
Black in the holler rocks and thick as blood.
The grass were ghost grass in that bitter land:
Greasewood and mesquite grew there, and the sand
Were hell-fire on our feet. The nooning suns
Beat hammers on our brains. And bleaching bones
Burned on our eyes: the white skull-faces grinned.

"Thinking of dead men, dust on the desert wind,
Slow we moved and silent. Our food were grass

And moccasin parfleche. This here coon'll pass
The ante if 'tain't starving doings, wagh!
Then Wolfskill downed a coyote in a draw,
And we made meat and et. Come dawn we saw
Snow mountains edging sky. Our waterskins
Went empty, and our bellies ganted, thin's
A crane's leg; and our tongues cracked, and our lips
Dropped the slow ooze of blood as the red meat drips
Fat on the scorching coals. From there we went
The journey of a day: our mules were spent,
And so mule were our meat, mule blood our drink,
And our bread were roots. . . . On wind-gnawed brink
Of death we marched: afore us many ridges
Of naked stone in the way. The crazy midges
Pranced on the sand.

"Come morning-break we stood
On a clift of rock. Afore us were a wood
Green, and the grass were green, and birds were singing
Fit to break their pretty throats and ringing
In our ears like heaven music. 'Bill, hurraw!'
Yelps Silverthorne, 'here's April doings, wagh!'
And there were water shining in the sun.
And grouse asquawking. I ups my rifle gun:
'Here goes for meat,' says I, and cracks a bird
Plumb center. Dang my hind sights, take my word,
If'n his head went one way, slick as glass,
And his body t'other, and him still squawking. Grass
Were sharp as knives and cut the hosses' mouth.
'Here's wet wood and no fire, and the wind are south!'
Says I. 'Here's fire!' says old Wolfskill, and takes
His hatchet to a tree: a shower of flakes
Flew like snow in February. . . . Which
It were stone country or I'm a whelping bitch.
Everything were stone, the buffalo berries
Were emeralds, dang my eyes! and the red chokecherries

Were rubies, bright as blood, and the sweet wild plums
Were garnet jewels bigger nor my thumbs,
And the crick was solid diamond, yes-siree!
Dabbled with morning light as ye ever see.

"We filled our rucksacks and juned out of there,
Richer nor Astor. Our hearts were big, I swear,
And singing squamptious. No more freezing, wagh!
Wading for beaver: we would trap a squaw,
A white one, down San Louie way, and blow
Our jewels like a boorshway, we would so!
But, hell! stone fruit and yarbs are mighty poor
Feeding for critters: we damn nigh starved afore
We hit game country. Our last cayuse went
For potluck. And them jewels all were spent
To buy another day of living; left
'Em by the trail, we did, to ease the heft
Of packs on galling shoulders . . .
"Well, at last,
We shet that buzzard's pasture, and we passed
Into a country sweet as hills of home,
The wild orchards heavy with autumn, the cool loam
Spicing our nose with its smell. The hungry days
Forgotten, we built a cabin in that place
And trapped . . .
"And laughed alive . . .
"Now, Sam, hark'ee,
Three pilgrims out of hell were we, that spree."

"*Vaya, amigo!*" scoffed Juan Marceline,
"Those ruby, I would see heem."
"Well, here's one
The which I kept."
"*Hola!* those have I seen,
Quinzas moochas. Those Indios of the sun,

Those Navajo, have many. *Que vengan,*
Those are the cheap stone, *si! Oh, Marco mio,*
Those country have you cheat, *pensaba yo!*"

Bill Mitchell guffawed: "Wagh, Mark, well I swear,
You're simple as kit beaver. That pebblestone
Cain't shine with this child; many's the one, by gar,
I've picked up here and yan. Next thing ye'll hone
Ye've been to Colter's Hell. And mebbe've gone
And seen them blue-eyed giants with red hair
To Timpanagos, wagh!"
"Well, I been there!"

So to the drone of tales the winter went:
The sun a lingering specter and the moon
A ghost of ghosts. The wind in fury bent
The sapling spruce pines, flustering a tune
From the twanged branches. "Ha, Jeff, this old coon
Is froze for summer doings, I am, wagh!"
And men went silent, waiting for the thaw.

The season of much snow, the black-calf moon,
Came like a yelping wolf, like a wild beast howling
On the high hills. The sun on the frozen rune
Of the lake etched smoky words. The frost wind
prowling
The forest darks, like a gaunt grizzly growling
Over a carrion dream, cried down to sleep. . . .
The white clouds drifted on the sky's blue deep.

Days . . . over . . . the long V's of northing geese;
Breath of the warm chinook: the thawing rain
Washing the valleys: the melancholy lees
Of winter (husks of ice and snow) adrain
Into quick rivers, brimming them again

With flood: the cottonwoods wore fragile bloom
Of life. . . . Men heard the diving beaver's boom.

Then traps were set again by the beaver slides,
And packs grew heavy with the take of fur.
The awakening shadbush glowed on the mountainsides;
The buffalo flowers were an opalescent blur
In the meadow glades, the certain harbinger
Of summer. Festooned swift on the snow's retreat,
Ghost's lariat spread its noose for unwary feet.

FANDANGO

Now when the days like whooping crane had flown,
And finch and whitethroat chirred in the aspen trees
And larks swam on the sky, then Taos town
Lingered in men's dreams: the warm south breeze
Whispered of dark-eyed girls with slender knees
Of dancing gold asway in opulent bowers,
The sun's hands on them, their breasts like budding
flowers.

And so they marched in that country of red earth:
By Popo Agie; North Platte; Bayou Salade;
Smelt April steam from the ground in sibilant mirth:
Wind from the . . . west by south . . . and April dead
They left the valleys: snow beneath their tread
They stood on the great divide: the world lay strange
From Sangre Cristo to the San Juan range.

"Hump, you goddamn mules, there's Taos walls,
A lazy greaser sleeping in the sun.
Here's beaver and yan's liquor, and girls tall's
A gringo's heart: some punkins, wagh! This coon
Has got a dry and liquor's on the run,
And Spanish gals want kissing. I'm on my prowl,
A ring-tailed roarer, and this is my night to howl."

They took the noon with the hawks, and evening
found them
Over the vale of Taos, the way down going:
Fair fields were at their feet, and the soft airs round
them

Were sweet with clover breath and the west wind
blowing.
They came to Arroyo Hondo, the cool creeks flowing
Beside the footways. "Hai! Hai! Hai!" they chanted,
Aride through the ruddy dusk where the last sun
slanted.

Forgotten the bitter days now, the hard luck
Of sleep on frost-rimed earth: the hunger nights:
The chill iron sting of traps in the oozy muck
Of beaver dams: death in the running fights,
Blood in the thirsty sand, the feather flights
Of arrows like swooping hawks. . . . Behind, flesh's
fear;
Before, the heart of love in the sweet of the year.

Brown men slouched by the way as they sought quartel.
"Outen, ye dirty greasers, ye cain't shine now.
Fetch on your fiddle, fetch on your Spanish gal,
This child is hot for dancing. Howgh-owgh-owgh!
Here's mountain men half froze for kissing, wagh!
Limber your pretty legs, now, lift your knee,
Fetch on the smart corn liquor, we're on our spree!"

How the throat of a girl is for love, and the curving
bands
Of her arms a shelter against the ruck of years;
And her breasts as globed fruit under the passionate
hands
Of hot winds smoothing the camisitas. Fear's
Way is not with her and the dabble of tears
Washed from the eyes . . . Oh golden, she comes singing,
Laughter over her heart like bright birds winging.

Dolores, Isobella, Estrellita,
Don the bright enáguas, pile the hair
Like hills of midnight: lift, O dark Juanita,
Slim zapatitos, stain the brown breast bare
With dust of desire: let the pendent ear
Cascade with gold: let eyes flash daringly,
Here's mountain men, wagh! hell-bent for a spree.

Fandango . . . beat tombé! Oh, sing, guitar!
Click your castanets! O swift feet, whirl!
What dream is there? Dolores Salazar:
Oh, you are lovelier than spilt moonlight: swirl
Your skirts, sweet wine of love, immortal girl,
And fill the eyes with beauty beyond fashion
Of tears and grief, stir the quick blood to passion.

Young Dick Wooten, tall as a mountain oak,
Stooped through the six-foot door. His blue eyes ran
Like sparkled water round the room. He spoke:
"Stand back, pelados, ye cain't shine; mountain men
Are on the prowl." Dolores laughed. And then
Dick stopped, gone beaver; his heart began to prance:
"Come here, Spanish gal, if'n ye wants to dance!"

Honey on the mouth, wine to the lips,
Was Dolores Salazar. Like a grizzly bear
Dick crushed her to him. The cry of singing whips
Lashed in his blood. Her evening-scented hair
Reeked in his nostrils. The consuming flare
Of her eyes set spark to the tinder of his heart,
And love seared through its night like a flaming dart.

Dolores, Dolores Salazar:
Hair of midnight, eyes of a star,

Why do you wake this sanguine war
In a strong man's breast? What devilry,
Weaver of dreams, brought this to be?
Your woman's body, your glance of fire,
Brown bronze body, flesh of desire,
Why have you wakened this ancient war
In a strong man's breast to his hurt, to his mar?
Dolores, Dolores Salazar!

Mute and uncertain Dick Wooten danced, amazed
At this moon-dawn in his night. His dizzy brain
Reeled (the tombé clanged to deaf ears); dazed
He danced. Dolores murmured: "Yanqui man,
Speak the espanol, si?" and smiled in his shirt.
Love poured from his lips in a surgent spurt.

One moment black eyes lifted with a quick bright
stare,
Next moment lids slanted again: ears drank soft words
Half-understood: copper-pale light aflare
From seven-pronged candelabra, like shadow birds
Nested in her breast. . . .
Then broken sherds
Of dream fell at her feet as jealous hate
Spewed from hot lips like rivers in black spate.

Dark Ramon, stepping proudly in swift rage,
Seized Dolores from Dick's arms. "Hai-ai-owgh!"
Dick's war cry split the rafters: like a gage
Of battle he hurled his coonskin: with a blow
Leveled his assailant. Then the show
Began for fair. . . . Odds even: ten times ten
Pelados to a dozen mountain men.

Don Ramon's knife leaped out as triple-score
Pelados swooped. Jeff whirled a broken chair
Like a flail in harvest on a threshing floor.
Sam whooped: "Ho, boys, Green River!" Devil-may-
care,
Felled greasers, as a hungry grizzly bear
Shakes down plums in autumn. Women squawled
In fear. Dogs barked and fled. Bambinos bawled.

The floor was slick with blood: pelados lay
In garnered windrows.... One, head-cracked, would
lie
In the black ruck of hell till the judgment day:
One, gut-stuck, swore because he couldn't die.
Chabonard bellowed forth a bedlam cry:
"Outen, ye goddamn greasers, cain't ye see,
Brown skin don't shine here this jamboree."

They cleared the sala: reached quartel and guns.
The prefect threatened jail; the trappers laughed:
"Our sticks float 'gin that water."
At blink of sun's
Uprise Dick Wooten dreamed awake. Men chaffed
At his face of woe: "Ho, Dickon, be ye daft?
Trapping a Mex is soft pie. Yan's the road,
And yan's Bent's Fort. Salazar's a pretty load."

The sun in warm pools rippled on the stone
Of Taos plaza. Hooves drummed on the street.
Dolores Salazar stole out alone
From her father's patio; cold fear, like sleet,
Stormed in her blood. The plomp of horse's feet
Stopped at her side. She looked up, caught the eye
Of young Dick Wooten, a god against the sky.

He stooped and whispered: "Here is hoss and man
To take and keep ye if'n your heart's that way."
"Si, Yanqui man!" she quavered, her dark face wan
With dread—and happiness. She felt him lay
His arm about her, lift her; felt the sway
Of speed as hard hooves flying beat the road
Hell-bent for heaven. . . .

Dick smiled:

"A pretty load!"

RENDEZVOUS

Time goes . . . and the trail goes . . . loud with winds
Over new countries (and those others) summer green
On the hills: sun on the deserts, bitter rinds
Of hunger in the teeth: thin rivers seen
In a naked place of sand: frost singing keen,
Feet on the mountains faring. . . . Oh, the swelling cry
Of life that leaps in the heart: and dreams that die.

In those days . . . dark trails under . . . by valley and
hill,
Beasts in their dark blood's welter: at rendezvous
Men roistering, desirous to spill
The hard life, the yawning fear, in the beaded dew
Of a rum cup's amber. . . . Lonely, without rue,
Taking the new trail: lost swift rivers flowing
Under their eyes . . . and strange stars . . . westward
going.

Men remembered hunger: days of feast: and the stir
Of lives rubbed out by the red hands of hate:
By the silver-tip's fanged fury. . . . Quest of fur
Grew death's quest in men's time: death soon or late,
Dark tide rip, caught them in its headlong spate
To the deeps of unremembrance. Quick men swore
At rendezvous: "Wagh! Jed's gone under shore."

Or: "Injuns got Jim Hawkins Heely way."
So life went out of men, and empty husks
Cluttered the unknown passes: sherds of clay

Bleached by the alkali holes: recurrent dusks
Filled the hollow skulls that fury's tusks
Had ravaged. . . . The wheeling planet sees
With eyes of light no riddles black as these.

And they that walked in that land: Death by the knife
Had reft Bill Mitchell from the ways of men
On Coeur d'Alene. Bill Williams left his life
To nurse a grizzly's hunger. Old Rube's span
Dwindled by Yellowstone . . . so the long tale ran.
There it happened . . . that the year . . . just so was
tossed
The dice of men's days and the wager lost.

Ko-ko-ko-oh! Ko-ko-ko-oh! the prairie owl
Cried his word. Sam Redstone and Jeff Boone
Hearkened in the dusk. The staccato howl
Of a coyote split the wind rip: the slim moon
Sailed the horizon sea. They heard the croon
Of aspens, breeze caught: the long thunder-zoom
Of the nighthawk's falling cascades in the gloom.

Aride at dawn, they edged the misty range
Where the blue sage begins. Sharp, curious eyes
Of marmots peered from caverns, starry strange,
In the hilled towns.
At noon they topped a rise:
Long land under the wind (a new surprise
Stared in their faces) the valleys of summer spread
Before them, the Three Tetons overhead,
Indifferent gods.
Oh, white eternal flowers:
Snow song; sun song; song of dust and stars:
Cloud-dividing beauty. . . . Aeoned hours
Pass: and the winds pass: and men's futile wars:

And the sift of stone flows down: and the crumbled
scaurs
Blow to forgotten ash. . . . Oh, singing ghost
Of peace in the heart! Oh, time's insatiate boast!

"Wagh!" Sam whispered, "Hark'ee, Jeff, that shines.
There's Manitou! There's God's own doings, boy!
A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire . . . fine's
I ever see." Jeff stood, a seeker of joy
Before the shrine of beauty (Gildenroy
Wistful at love's altar), seeing the white
Essence of his dream in the noon-still light.

In a secret corner of his heart a spark
From a spent flame blossomed, at its burning core
The vision of a face: from the cloudy murk
Of half-forgotten days it rose and wore
The magic of old love long whelmed before
The storm-flood of new living: wild, time-tossed,
He'd found the memory of something lost.

"Pierre's Hole lies yan." Jeff's vision fled
On tenuous air. . . . They took the downgoing way
To rendezvous. Before the valley spread,
Veined with creeks, ingrained with flower spray,
A blanket of rich dyes: the aspens gray
And silver in the breeze. The sunfall made
Long seas of light between the tree-blue shade.

"Wagh! yan passel's more'n I seen afore.
Big doings, boy." Sam waved a weathered hand
To the hunter's town sprawled on the valley floor:
The bright skin wigwams of a Napercy band;
Flathead tipis; trappers' tents; a stand
Of bark fur-houses; frail wickiups of sedge;
And tall in the central field the Boorshway's lodge.

Wayfarers on the trail of fur men came
Daily more and more to the transient town:
From Blackfoot lands and valleys of no name;
From Timpanagos, and the country sown
With poisoned death down Gila way; from brown
Savannas by the Horn; from Saptin, Grand,
Black Wasatch; and from Humboldt's burning sand.

Each morning broke upon a surging shore
Of tumult: fall of dark and day come light
Meat crackled on the spit—hump rib galore;
Whisky from flat kegs gurgled, water-white
Corn liquor, whelping laughter or a fight
Impartially. Big doings! And dark girls there
Smiled with love in their eyes, the wind in their hair.

"Panther pizen! Wagh, that shines!"
"How's shootin'?"
"Squirrel's eye at a hundred yards. Plumb center.
Damn,
Old Liz can make 'em come, now, hell for tootin'."
"I'm a ring-tailed wampus cat, do'ee hear, I am!
I eats raw meat and I drinks blood. I can lam
Grizzlies dead with my fist. I'm on my spree!"
"Beaver ten dollars a plew, lad, yes sirree!"

Potent brew: steeped sunlight: men grown gods!
Warriors: tellers of tales: hunters of beasts
Mighty of mane: strong with the thunder rods
Of Jove: riders of Bucephalus: treaders of the East's
Bright morning lands: ravagers of the West's
Great gold. Halcyon! Thus the rich days rolled
Like sweet of spice on the tongue. . . . Then fires fell
cold.

In the moon of strawberries ripe, men went their ways:
Jefferson Boone, Sam Redstone, Rob Sinclair,
Markhead, and Marceline, with the lifted blaze
Of dawn set foot to trail: Al Boone, Pierre
La Mort, Batiste Le Jeune: those devil-may-care
Mad mountain men, Kit Carson, Major Meek,
And Bridger. . . . They took the night at Alder creek.

Came Nat Wyeth with his Bostons: Milt Sublette
And the Company brigade, a likely band:
Under the climbing moon. (Now was the debt
Of blood grown mighty.) Moon to westward: sand
Of night ran out; the red day rose to stand
A spear's height on the mountain. The drift of smoke
Smudged on the sky. . . . Sudden a cry awoke:

"Brown skin's running, wagh! Blackfoot, 'fore hell!"
Along the eastern ridge they came, a sleet
Of hooves on drumming earth downflung pell-mell
To the valley's level acres: thunderous feet
Stinging the earth to turmoil. Then the bleat
Of many tongues in the loud wind . . . surf on stone.
The tribe paused . . . then out marched one man alone.

"Here's parley," Sublette said. "Here's pipe of peace.
Antoine, make smoke!" Antoine Godin, beside
A Flathead chief, rode forward. Godin fils
Remembered Godin père who last year died
On Blackfoot spears. "Dose rifle," Antoine cried
To the Flathead, "ees she primed, yes, *mon ami?*
Sacré! dose Blackfoot she's lose hair dees spree."

"*Qui vive!*" Hand of treachery in the hand . . .
"Shoot!" The Flathead's ready rifle spoke.
Reek of lifted hair! The Blackfoot band

Stood stock the space of a breath, then rage awoke
The hills with throated din. Two riders broke
And swooped like eagles swift on the seek of prey,
Stooped to the chief's corpse, bearing it away.

Forted in the river swamps, they fought
Among the cottonwoods: the driven ash
Of arrows on the air. The febrile cough
Of fusils mingled with the singing lash
Of mountain rifles. Under the thunder crash
Death was a dark bird flying with evil wings. . . .
Now was the end of warriors and of kings.

Rob Sinclair crept to the tangled brake;
Behind him Jefferson Boone and Sam Redstone,
Bridger, Meek, and Carson, swiftly took
Precarious way, with twenty others known
To fame—or not known.
"Wagh!" cried Milt Sublette,
"On 'em for old Missou'. . . . By God, I'm hit
And cain't fight nohow!"
Nat Wyeth bore him out,
Winning him from the war. . . . The Blackfoot chant
Of death rang in men's ears like the wailing shout
Of wind on scaurs of granite. . . . Sinclair went,
The bite of lead in his heart, the bright air blent
With sudden shadow . . . under . . . the sun drew south,
Fire in the brain, the dust of ash in the mouth.

Sam Redstone shouted: "Jeff, they've finished Rob."
Jeff cursed in his throat, then: "Give the niggers
beaver;
The goddamn butchers!" His voice broke with a sob.
From the right Jim Bridger yelped: "Ho, boys, Green
River!"

Hawk's cry on the mouth and arrows' shiver
And rifle murk in the slow hours: afternoon
Waned: the wind in the trees was a battle tune.

At last the generous dark! Spent warriors slept
Under the gibbous moon (red men and white);
The moon sloped westward and the cool dew wept
From the cottonwoods. . . .
Stars covered, and the light
Grew quick in the leaves: dust of the sun was bright,
Blown on the haunted air: and the birds were loud
By the creek where yesterday death's grain was sowed.

But silence only ripened in that field
Behind the barricade: stillness of flesh
Was in that place: quick blood had given yield
By darkness—men marched out to the secret mesh
Of mountains and dark ways. . . . Now trappers, fresh
For newer onset, mounted the stockade,
Their feet in the bloody litter war had made.

All had not flown: beside a tree's black bole
One Blackfoot woman crouched with eyes of fear.
Jeff spoke her kindly. . . . A Napercy stole
Swift-moccasined upon her: the long spear,
Thirsting, drank her life, ere Jeff could veer
Its thrust. Love's body lost on the trampled sand,
Her spirit sought love's ghost in the shadow land.

Jeff Boone's rifle spit the bright word: death!
The Napercy stumbled on a darkening trail . . .
Gage of other war. . . . "Jeff, hark'ee, breath
Ain't to be wasted," Sam cried, "time we tail
Away from here: white hair'll be the bail
Napercys'll be after, like as not.
There's sign arunning, boy, we'd better trot."

New lands and the sun over:

Jefferson Boone,

Sam Redstone, compañeros, knee to knee,
Rode on the old adventure, the subtle rune
Of living in the ears: Oh, good to see
Earth and its great beauty; good the free
Song of love in the heart . . . dark mountains under
Tread of foot:

in the sharp wind:

and the huge thunder!

"Gildenroy was a bonny boy
With silver to his shoon;
His leggins of the white doeskin
With fringes hanging down:
No other lad in all the earth
Could fill my heart with joy;
He was my jo and heart's delight,
My handsome Gildenroy.

"My Gildenroy and I were born
Right in this town together;
We scant were seven years afore
We began to love each other;
Our pappies and our mammies, both
Their hearts were filled with joy,
To think upon the bridal day
'Twixt me and Gildenroy.

"With joy and glee we spent our prime
Till we were both sixteen,
And oft we passed the longsome time
Among the leaves so green;
And oft upon the banks we'd sit
And sweetly kiss and toy,
With garlands gay he'd deck my hair,
My handsome Gildenroy.

"For Gildenroy, my own true love,
A pretty gown I bought,
A wedding sark of hollands fine

With silken flowers wrought;
And he gave me a wedding ring,
For I was all his joy:
No lad could sing so blithe as he,
My own dear Gildenroy.

"Oh! that he still had been content
With me to lead his life;
But, ah! his manful heart was bent
To stir in feats of strife:
And he in many a venturous deed
His courage bold would try;
And now my heart is filled with woe
For my dear Gildenroy.

"And when of me his leave he took
The tears mine eyes did brim,
I gave to him a parting look:
My blessing go with him,
God speed him well, my own dear heart,
For gone is all my joy
Since he has left me here alone,
My handsome Gildenroy."

The days, the nights, flowed one by one to years.
As a river to the sea was Margaret's life:
One day, another, sad song in the ears;
Memory endured; love's trenchant knife
Cutting the heart. . . . Time over: the long nights rife
With old regret! Time: and the hoped-for word
A silence as of stone, a tale unheard!

Spring returned with the shaking of haw-flower snow
From slender branches; the redbird like a flame
Burned in the wild crab apple; the frail blow

Of violets starred the grass. . . . All was the same
As other springs; she heeded not. There came
No word of death or life from dark frontiers
To give life to the death of those lost years.

Summer: and hope deferred, almost a thing
Beyond the will to wish; infinity
Pressed on her like a hand too heavy; wing
Of fear a lingering shadow. . . . June waned. Glee
Of wind and waterbrook called to her. She
Cared naught: the dreams that burned along her vein
Were whelmed in surgence of a secret pain.

Autumn: and holocaust among the trees!
Time is a ghost that flees; a nightmare dream
Haunting a troubled sleep—the hurt soul sees
The tumbled wrack of faith. Time is a stream
To drown the heart's delight. Time is a gleam
To light the way to death. . . .
Yet may the eyes
Beyond the dream see, undismayed, love's skies
Made bright with mornings. . . .

Winter: and the sleep
Of laughter held the earth in quietness.
Snow hovered down the hours. Given to the keep
Of frost, the water was a cloudy glass
To mimic naked branches. . . . Slow to pass
Her days, as water under ice. . . . Again
The sad year swirled out in a draggled rain.

So spring by spring the buds burst to pale bloom;
Summer by summer the starflowers glowed and died;
Autumn by autumn passed with its windy broom
Sweeping the dust of leaves; long winters cried

In the eaves with spirit-voices, prophesied
The frail last spark of hope blown from an ember
Graying to ash; yet her heart intoned: Remember!

Remember? Life and its gaunt ghost to haunt her!
She made of daily tasks a shielding wall
To fend her from despair. But still, to daunt her,
Her hours were fief to memory: its pall
Shrouding her like a garment. So were all
Her nights a loneliness, her days a scroll
To record the gradual passage of a soul
From light to darkness, darkness into light.

Now once again the autumn's dawning dusk
Before the sun, was fabric of cool white
Shot through with gold and blue. The broken husk
Of night unfolded; the odor of faint musk
Scented the air; through the frost-pallid pane
The new light drifted as a fragile rain.

Her mind adaze with slumber gone too soon,
Margaret came to the dog-run, her bright hair
A blossom of frail gold lost from old June
Asway on its slender stem of flesh. . . . The blare
Of boat horns, riverward, set her astare
With eager eyes—heart stilled. . . . The singing horn
Dwined down to silence, easting with the morn.

Mirth has end: men go their ways, now,
Forgetting the dream dreamed long in vain.
Life, love, laughter, the singing days, now,
Flame goes dark in the smoldering haze, now,
The dream burned out, love lost to pain.

In this pale dusk whose heart is tossed here
Under the leaves of a going year?
Prostrate under the feet of frost, here,
What ghost is crying for beauty lost here,
The vision of love loved doubly dear?

Long ago, long to remember,
Long I remember with drear regret.
Vainly I blow on the darkened ember
With lips pinched white by the chill December. . . .
I will remember. Do you forget?

Once I loved but love is dark, now,
Lost in the west, love lost afar.
Silence has taken the song of the lark, now;
The body of dream is cold and stark, now;
Lost is love . . . and the dusk's lone star.

Margaret stood alone in the early light;
Saw pictures of life past and life to be:
Old days of love and laughter and the bright
Sift of dream in her eyes; new days to dree
With long regret; man's death; and man aflee
To the wilderness of silence; the old fire
Of ecstasy cold ashes on time's pyre.

"This world and this world's joy, why was it wrought
With loving-kindness so all-ever bright
For us to look upon," she vaguely thought,
"Only to fetch the coiling dark of night
To murk the day? Why wake the singing white
Petal of happiness one mortial hour
Only to blight with frost the opening flower?"

Puzzle-brained with life she walked to the field
Brown with stubble; to the willow glade where roots
Were washed by dwindled waters. The last yield
Of song was sad in her ears; the latest fruits
Of flowers alone left to foraging newts
Tunneling the grassy acres; a dove's thin call
Stirred sorrow in her heart.

Short interval
She stood by the field gate so, as one in sleeping.
Vaguely she knew the sun on the long slopes breaking
In golden avalanche; the white clouds creeping
The highways of the air; the cool wind, waking
Crisp music in blade and leaf; the bright leaf, taken
By the kiss of frost. . . . "Upon this breast," she smiled,
"Come rest your head from desert journeys wild."

Wearily by the creek path home she went.
Low-voiced, the breezes through the branches slipped;
Softly beneath the willows' mottled tent
Rabbit and squirrel from dusk to shadow whipped;
Spiderwebbed on the sky, gaunt branches stripped
Of leaves arched eerily. . . . Her mind was fraught
With the dark tormented battle of old thought.

What with her soul's turmoil and making sad,
She did not see another quickly come
Along the path; a girl in linsey clad,
Elvish, on wind-quick feet, her lips ahum
With inward music. Margaret startled dumb
Beside the stile. Then: "Chloe, Chloe Boone,
Will he come back, oh, will he come back soon?"

And: "Will he come back to me? Oh, have you
heard?"

No, she had not, not since he left; but she
Said, "No news is good news! That's the word
Uncle Nathan gives. Leastways, it seems to me
We'd heard if aught's to do. Sam Redstone, he
Would let us know ere-ever." Heart's desire
Glowed deep in Margaret's eyes, a still blue fire.

"Keep a good courage," Chloe said again.
"The forts are scarce and far, so I've heard tell;
A thousand miles of mountainy land and plain
'Tween Bent's on Arkansaw and the Musselshell.
It's wild and lone out yan. The Indians, (knell
Clanged harsh on Margaret's ears) the Indians, they
Are most the friends of trappers, so they say."

The words struck Margaret's heart and gave to ice
Its coursing blood: the years were growing old!
"He promised he'd come back." Fear's subtle vise
Screwed tighter. "He's not dead—not dead!" Ah, cold
The empty sky leered back; the wild words rolled
In mockery from the bluffs; the echoes, calling,
Fell heavy on her soul as great stone falling.

WEST WIND'S DRIFT

"Good evening, Ma'am! Good evening, Mister! News
I'm bringing ye fresh from Heaven, well, I am!
Oregon or the Shining Mountains: choose
Whichever it shall be. This child can cram
Your ears with unknowen what. Now, hark'ee, Ma'am,
And hark'ee, Mister, I come from western seas,
I do, with my news fresh from Heaven and my apple
trees."

Matt Byrne said: "Well, stranger, come and set.
What might your name be called, if'n I make bold?"
The stranger's eyes, dark as the beaded jet
Of apple pips, smiled gently: "Well, I'm told
There's many Missoura way have heard of old
John Appleseed—born Jonathan Chapman—blown
About these lands this thirty years agone.

"I'm right well known in Ohio country, west
To Indianny, and the roads atween. . . .
But could I trouble ye for a bite, and rest
The night out on your hearthstun? I have seen
Hard doings in my time, and these here lean
Shanks aren't honing for soft living now:
These puncheons will sleep nicely, they will so!"

"Sartin sure! we can fix ye up a bite:
Margaret, spread the table!" Milk and mush,
Hominy grits and venison; honey bright
From the hollow tree; sweet-tasting cider, blush

From the Northern Spy; Johnnycakes; and the lush
Butter of pawpaws! "Well, Mister, pull and set."
"Mush and wild honey, king's food, ye can bet!"

"Trader?" Matt Byrne asked, with supper done.
"Of sorts," the answer. Again Matt: "Ary skins
In your pack?"
"No skins."
"Mebby salt: that's scarce." Quick fun
In Johnny's eyes: "Not salt."
"Gold! Ha! that wins
The wager."
"No, not gold. More precious. Fine's
Ye ever see, this lade."
"Well, a fellar's needs
Are topped by gold. What's yan, John?"
"Appleseeds!"
"Appleseeds? Do tell!"
"My fortune's there:
Each seed's a tree: ten thousand in that bag.
Think of their sweet blows spicing the April air;
The birds among the blooms. Think of the sag
Of branches heavy with the autumn lag
Of red and golden fruit. . . . Yan is my way
To lay up riches against the judgment day.

"A many years have sped since first I brought
My apples to the wild lands. There's some grown
To wealth of fruit and died, frost-nipped, storm-
caught,
This thirty years. Great many, as I've known
Give sup to men in my time. Planted, hoe'n,
Guarded them, ten thousand, without fee,
From Ohio lands clean to the western sea."

"Well, mebbe you're right," Matt said, stirring the
pack
With the toe of his boot. "Sartin there is a need
Of apples in these-abouts." He hefted the sack;
Murmured: "Not skins, not gold, but . . . appleseed.
Well, dang my eyes!" He smiled. Then John: "My
creed
Through Swedenborg, straight out of the Holy Book,
see?
We fell by apples, we'll be saved by apples, look ye!"

"I am sure that you're right," Margaret said, and
smiled.
"I am, now, do ye see? Did ye ever try
The Song of the Appleseed to find the wild,
Unknowen will of dreams; to search the why
And wherefore of the ways of love, the cry
Of magic in the heart? Well, now let's say
The Song of the Appleseed, to find love's way.

"One I love,
Two, I love,
Three, I love, I say;
Four, I love with all my heart;
Five, I cast away.
Six, he loves,
Seven, she loves,
Eight, they both love,
Nine, he comes. . . ."

Matt Byrne broke in: "And so ye've traveled, Mister?
Ye say to the western sea?" "Well, now, I have,"
Johnny answered. "And the Shining Mountains.
Blister
Me if I haven't. Clean out to the salten wave,

Beyond the bitter desert, the stony cave
Haunted of wolf and snake. . . . There I have seen
The mid of winter pranked with April green.

"Close by yan ocean under the setting sun,
There's country, Mister; fine as ye ever saw,
Now, hark'ee, Ma'am. I've been there. Oregon
The land is called; far and beyant the Kaw
And the Shining Mountains. Hudson Bay's the law
In that country. But what's law! Land there's the
best,
By Multnomah and the River of the West.

"A spang-new land that never has felt the plow;
All for the taking. Rich soil! A man may thrive
There in those valleys. Trees! The spruce-pines grow
Clean to the stars on those great mountains: five,
Six hundred feet, now hark'ee, as I live.
Wild game aplenty goes there: elk and deer;
Fish in the running streams . . . and the beaver's weir.

"Beyant Multnomah's a valley cupped in hills;
Tuality, the Indians name its name;
A garden of the Lord where April spills
Her lade of laughter, and summer is a dream
Of gold and pieded flowers, and autumn flame
Dies slowly there to shadow; like green seas,
The little prairies islanded with trees."

"Better than these fenced acres," Matt dreamed. "Here
Frost and fever and taxes!" Free land: glint
Of avarice in the eyes! Land: title clear!
A thousand acres, ten thousand; fire in flint
To kindle the heart to flame! Cattle without stint,

Cattle on a thousand hills. . . . This land's too old.
New land: by the western sea! Sweet kernel rolled
On the tongue. . . .

"Bare plain, it was; a sandy track
By the River Saptin. And from there we went
The journey of a day. . . ." Johnny's voice called back
Matt's wandering wits. "There the river bent
A great hook round tall stony mountains hent
With ice; three glittering towers beyant great trees;
And the sharp rains drove down, and the winds that
freeze.

"Four days yet we traveled afore jagg'd peaks
Pinched in. We lost the trail; in the mountains, snow,
Under a ghost of sky; and the raddled breaks
Of wind beat the trees like drums, wind as might blow
The world to flinders. Come dusk, and the sunset's
glow
Dripped like the drip of blood from a gash of cloud;
Enduring the night the wind failed, and it snowed.

"The morn was mad with flakes; the noon was white
Smother beneath the sky. Day slanted down
To darkness; hush came with the falling night.
Again the morning: wind was a cold breath blown
From lips of ice. . . . Lost in that land unknown
Of men, we fled in fear, the heart grown old
Under the stumbling light. . . . The night fell cold.

"Our tongues were food in our mouths, the belly
pinched
With dearth! And we came by snowlands east and
north
To a lake shaped like a heart; the great rocks trenched

By canyons. We took the snow for bed; our hearth
The frown of stone. . . . The pass led over; forth
The rivers gushed toward sunrise. . . . And we came
To a land accursed; brimstun and molten flame!

"Sartin sure, we'd broke through into Hell. . . .
Steam spit from the fissured rocks, now, do'ee hear?
And springs were biling and pretty as a shell—
Purple and green and blue and diamond clear—
Like a rainbow, yes sirree. And we could hear
The imps of Hell alaughing down below;
And the Old Bear himself, now, we did so!

"Well, Mister, if 'tweren't Hell this child don't know,
And he knows bull from fat cow. . . . Everywhere
Mud biling like a mush pot; trees ablow
With flowers, black as haw berries; in the air
Great bats with fangs of iron, fit to tear
The heart out of your breast; hawks went and came,
Feathered with fire, seest ye, and winged with flame.

"How long it was we stayed there I can't say;
'Twere better than the cold; but at last we made
Journey from that place. The Lord's last day
Seemed on us as we went; the long wind brayed
In our ears like the trump of doom. Well, now, we
prayed
To be saved out of that land; our blood faint where
The stone boomed hollow, under. . . . Men found us
there.

"Trappers, they were; and we were saved in that
country.
They gave us lodge for our sleep and they gave us meat.
So did we rest in those days walled from the wintry

Sting of frost. . . . And spring came with the bleat
Of sun-quick waters; and summer, with the heat
Dry in the wind; August, and rendezvous;
Men from the mountains; trade; recounted coup:

"Six redskins dead and Joe Meek saved alive;
Jefferson Boone rubbed out, and Sam Redstone
Carrion under the hawks; two lost of five
In a scrape on the Horn—" He paused at a stifled
moan
Of pain from Margaret. "You say—Jeff Boone—
Killed?" She gasped, "Not dead! No, no, not dead!"
"So I've heard tell, Ma'am!" pitying, Johnny said.

White-lipped she stood, her heart a bird of pain
Beating its cage of flesh. Then low she spoke:
"Tell me how it happened." As a rain
Beats to the earth a flower, life whipped and broke
Her spirit with harsh grief. . . . Johnny's voice awoke
Her to reality: "In the desert lands;
Blackfoot, it was; his blood in the thirsted sands."

The hearth burned out to the cold of blackened ash;
Night darkened. Insubstantial as a dream
Whirled the wan light within her; as the crash
Of stars, her world; the visionary gleam
Of beauty died, whelmed in the shadow stream
Of tumult in her soul! Love, a lost bloom,
Shriveled to dust upon a starry tomb.

DEATH ON THE RUNNING WIND

Autumn and winter, summer and April days,
Autumn and winter and summer. . . . Remembererd
hate
Lingered in men's dreams: in the August haze,
Blackfoot under the plum trees; passion's spate;
And men died there in that battle. . . . Soon or late
By that way men ride out, the whisper of sand
Under the horse tread, to that place named the Bright
Land.

Time flowed like a river: storm in the passes; cold;
Snow in the valleys white and deep as the thigh
Of a tall man; game scarce; the slow sun rolled
An ashen wheel on the mountains of the sky.
Ice; and the belly bitten with hunger; dry
In the steel wind the eyes, blinded; so the wintry
Weeks crept dark as death in a desperate country.

Days to an end again; spring green in the lands;
Hope in the heart! Once more with horse and gun
Men haunted the watertowns, the reedy strands
Of bayou, dam, and beaver slide; the run
Of otter, muskrat, mink. Hawks in the sun
Flew with the shadows of hawks. The endless river
Cried to men's hearts: "Beaver! Beaver! Beaver!"

So: Sam Redstone, Jefferson Boone, set trap
By beaver lodge and weir; among the stones
The sound of many voices, the dark lap

Of water beneath slim trees. Chill took the bone
Under the keen frost; lean patience! Before the sun
Sailed in the sky, bright where the blue wind paces,
They stood with morning, the long clean light in their
faces.

They garnered the rivers' wealth: the blond fur thick
With winter growth; pelts sleek for the summer trade
At rendezvous. Thus . . . days . . . with lure and stick,
Feet in the icy streams; alert to the raid
Of Sioux, Blackfoot, Grovan—ears quick to the tread
Of moccasin; wolf cry! Camp in the perilous dusk;
Lost in the campfire's flame fear's brittle husk.

Crouched in the tent of night in the moon's white
stare,
Words in their mouths were these: "Wagh, Jeff, what's
sign?"
"Fur prime and plenty! If'n were left to wear
Our scalps long ever. . . . " Fur scent was a wine
To nostrils; inebriate: "A-yes sir, fine
As I ever seen, now look'ee, this side Platte."
Then Sam: "Ten beaver today, tomorrow what?"

"Tomorrow?" Jeff laughed, "Well, now hark'ee, Sam;
Fur a heap!" say I. Sam, low-voiced, "Hell
A heap. Last creek and long trail! Damn,
There's sign arunning, lad! Now, le' me tell
A dream I dreamt last night." As if the spell
Yet held him captive, with thin words in the night
He spoke; and his eyes gleamed dark in the campfire's
light.

"I dreamt there were a crick in a valley break,
New to this child, but pretty as ye ever seen;
With trees, and a sunset sky. And I heered the craik
Of ducks in the reeds . . . or Injuns! and the trees were
green.
I were thirsted and hungry and needed that crick, and
then
A howling stormwind hit that dream and broke
It to flinders, struck me cold; and so I woke.

"My ears were ringing like San Gabriel bell.
That's sartin sign, I'm feared. . . ." Like a candle's
glow
His words snuffed out. The blaze of the campfire fell
To sparkled dust. The moon was a lingering flow
Of light through the aspen trees; the wind breathed
low
With the odor of leaves in that country; coyotes crept
And wailed on the ridges. . . . Done with words they
slept.

Dawn, and the world's edge flame, they went their
ways
To unknown valleys rich with a virgin loot.
Noon, and the level earth in the ardent blaze
Of zenith fire burned the hard hoof, the parching root
Starveled and wry. Dusk, and an owl's thin hoot
Haunted the sunset, red against the west,
Beyond a valley's verdure. . . .

"Here we rest.
My valley, lad! Yan is my dream," Sam said.
"Such stuff as dreams are made on . . . once I heered
A preaching man say that. If'n I wake up dead,
Come morning light, what's odds?" he lightly jeered

Premonitory tongues. "My valley!" Weird
In the sunset glow he stood, ancient of earth:
"Rounded with a sleep . . ." he laughed, a grotesque
mirth
Cackling from his beard.

"My valley! . . . Well,
Let's cache." The night fled westward where they lay
By the ashes of sage; and the stars went over. Spell
Of sleep weighed on them, moon wash in the spray
Of leaves, till edge of dawn. Advent of day
Was reek in the wind. . . . And shadows were in those
places
By the gray stones: death's eyes in painted faces.

Death's eyes in the outer dark! The wolves were still,
Aware of a strange rumor in the night.
Slowly the seed of light on the nearer hill
Grew to the flower of dawn, the fragile white
Lily of day; blossomed; and burst in the bright
Petals of flying death. The Blackfoot came
Out of the morning dusk with arrowed flame.

Wolf's howl in the throat, the sudden shout
Of warriors! A hurt mule screamed. Now swiftly fled
Death's hornets to the sting. In feathered rout
They came, a score of vultures, talons spread
For the swoop of blood. Jeff's rifle smoked. Hot sped
The leaden bee home to its hive. Down tossed
Doomed flesh, up spirit, putting on the ghost.

Sam cried: "Lad, if'n we wants to keep our hair
It's heels and a running start." His words fell short
As his rifle spit black flame. Then: "Wagh, lad, there,
Them rocks back yan'll make us a likely fort.

Run like hell, lad. There's bound to be a mort
Of wolf meat 'fore we're through, or I'm a squaw.
I'll hold 'em till ye've won free, I will, wagh!"

"Hell's full of Injuns! Happen I'll send some more
To company 'em 'fore leaving ye lone, old coon.
We'll slant together, else. . . ." An arrow tore
Through the sleeve of his hunting shirt. "Git ready. Soon
As I make this nigger crow's meat. . . ." Jefferson Boone
Grunted and swore. . . . His gun confirmed his boast.
Yells beat his ears like waves on a windy coast.

Upward they scuttered among the tumbled rocks;
And after them the Blackfoot in full cry.
Forted they turned; gone to earth as the fox
Before the pack. And dust in their mouths was dry,
Powder on the tongue. And the morning sky
Was a burn of brass to the flesh. The arrowed rain
Drummed like a storm of sleet on that perilous plain.

"Time's ticking fast, Jeff lad," Sam said. "My valley!
My bones have feel of it. I'll hold 'em, son,
Till ye've made a run, now, look'ee!" With sudden rally
The red men charged. Sam stood with level gun.
And arrow took him. There among the stone
He fell in a sprawl of blood. "Rubbed . . . out . . . at . . . last,"
He choked, "My . . . valley!" The ghost of death fled past.

Now Jeff was one, and the Blackfoot braves a score.
Sauve qui peut! He fled with heart of fear
Lost in the unknown earth, the secret door
Of life closed to his hand. Swift as the deer
Fleeing the belling hounds he sped, the drear
Long land naked before him, the level sage
A great space, and the mountains afar off. Ancient age
Seemed on him as he ran.

Far and away
Northeast a bloom of hills, a smoldering smoke
Of lavender shadow smudged against the gray
Horizon, offered haven. The heat waves broke
Like water, danced with laughter at the joke
Of destiny—of man pursuing man,
Eager for man's destruction. On he ran.

The sage clutched at his feet to say him nay;
The slow sand was a mire beneath his tread.
Gaunt wolves eager on the track of prey
The Indians pursued. . . . As wind, he sped
So short a space, yet hours it seemed; as lead
His heart. Far off the hills of his desire
Gloomed in his eyes, slow smoke of a beacon fire.

What refuge waited there! He dared to look
Across his shoulder at the harrying hounds
That nosed his trail. A wind of terror shook
His blood; two warriors coursing with great bounds
Led the relentless pack. The strident sounds
Of whoop and cry assailed his ears: the hate
Of man for man madly articulate.

How long, how far he ran, he could not know;
An hour, a mile, ten thousand miles? White noon
Burned at the zenith. Sudden the rhythmic blow
Of running feet on sand beat a dread tune
Into his brain. His eyes leaped back. Jeff Boone,
Life is a dwindled summer; bleaching, dry,
Breathed as a flame! The hovering hour is nigh!

One warrior mightier than his fellows came
With long lance dressed for slaughter. Time's swift
span
Seemed dwining deathward; beauty a lost name
In the throat of dream. Jeff clutched his rifle gun
With quick resolve; then headlong as he ran
He pivoted, his rifle bludgeoned, caught
His foe to the kiss of earth. And so was bought
A brief reprieve from terror.

Afternoon
Was midway down the west, the laggard day
Crept slowly to its hour. The ill-scrawled rune
Of a stream, green fringed, grew on his sight; away
Beyond the bitter desert, rugged gray,
The mountains towered, tempest-scarred and high,
A coign of refuge dark against the sky.

Again the cry of blood rose; once again
The rumor of swift feet thumped on the drum
Of his despair. A warhawk whizzed. A rain
Of sweat poured from his brow. A bowstring's hum
Was demon song. An arrow sped. A numb
Pain took him as the singing shaft of fire
Burned through his wrist. It seemed a red-hot wire
Gyved him.

He stumbled to his knees. A cry
Of triumph winced along the air and fled
With mocking echoes to the silence. High
A buzzard curved, impatient for the sped
Ghost, the carrion feast. The warrior, red
For slaughter, paused and poised his eager spear
For the final breach.

Instilled by body's fear
With panther's swiftness and with panther's strength
Jeff whirled to elude the frantic seeking blade,
With rifle parry the thrust; the saber length
Of iron bit the ground; the brave, dismayed,
Leaped back. Jeff seized the earth-sheathed spear;
essayed
The attack in turn; and like a man gone daft
In the warrior's belly buried the reeking shaft.

Time it takes to tell; but time is not
When hate swarms in men's hearts: the charge, the
thrust,
Were but a moment's passage. Swift, Jeff caught
Old Dan Boone's rifle from the bitter dust.
Once more the cries of men, the bloody lust
Hot in the brain, came to him. Once again
He fled, his feathered wrist a throbbing pain.

With eagle swoop they came, an eight or ten,
Blackfoot to the kill. Jeff's feet were flails
Beating out the grain of life. He ran
Toward that strip of foliage. Slow the wails
Of outsped warriors sank on his ears, as fails
A wind of death outblown. The herbage cast
Long shade on the farther slopes.

Serpent he passed
The fringing plums; the berry tangles, where
A gleam of water beckoned to his thirst;
His heart a thundering hammer, his breath a flare
Of flame to sear his throat, his veins a burst
Of tethered fire. With swollen lips he cursed
The attendant demons. Swift he sprawled and drank,
The feathering hellhounds hot upon his flank,
Then plunged into the stream.

A brackish flow
Of water closed above him, murky green;
Live creatures, silken, soft, slipped by him. Slow
As eternity it seemed he swam, the sheen
Of light in his eyes a faint translucent screen
To shield him from lancing death. . . . The light went
out
As his head broke water.

Far off a baffled shout
Muffled by strange night came to his ears. . . .
Where was he? Breath was in his nostrils, musk
Scent, heavy and fetid; animals snarled—weirs
Of the beaver; living creatures—deep in the dusk
Of an ancient lodge his refuge. The lost husk
Of life was sweet in his teeth. Hell's terrors braved,
His brain whirled as to music: "Saved! and saved!"

Brazen throats screeched out a baffled ire
At turgid water rippling the river reeds,
Settling to Jeff's plunge. Quenched as a fire
The blood-lust flame; hate thwarted. Human greeds
Unsated by man's skull crest, sign of deeds
Mighty of courage; they stood, checked by the take
Of waters, waiting that the waters break.

How long Jeff hung there in the beaver lodge
What man can tell? The haze of oblivion rose
To whelm his brain. Insensate to the nudge
Of fear, he drowsed toward life's dim border; close
Rapt to the golden regions, where frosts nor snows
Come ever, nor any pain, nor death's despair;
And all his thought was, "Safe! and safe!"

Time's care
Lay lightly on his being. Hours passed—
Or a year—or a century; he knew nor cared.
Safe! Ah, safe! Was it morning—or the last
Trump of this living! What mattered it! Men fared
What whither fate decreed; nor any dared
Defy his weird. . . . A curious beaver nuzzled
His hand: what monster this? The beaver, puzzled,
Boomed inquiry.

Crouched as a hovering quail
In covert, Jeff clutched at his addled wits,
Veering them back into the ordered trail
Of reason; gathering up the shattered bits
Of fear and hope, bridging the yawning pits
(Wide-open graves) to sanity and life,
To a world of love, and hate, and peace—and strife!

The river brimmed with shadow as he dragged
His body from the ooze, like a water rat,
Shoreward. The moon was mist-white on the cragged
Horizon. Wolves made night articulate
On the dim buttes. The wind was heavy with freight
Of wild-grape odor. The Dipper presaged dawn. . . .
Time to slant, Jeff Boone; time you were gone!

Something of portent lingered beneath the sky;
Cavorted on the wind—a seeking ghost
Of fear. He felt an eerie presence nigh.
Silence sang around him. The great host
Of stars in heaven faltered and were lost
Down the deep west. Jeff drank, and turned his face
Northeastward toward the mountains, that haven
place.

The red sun heaved above the eastern range,
Light flowed like water over the desert's rim,
As he made footway. . . . Vast, expectant, strange,
The canopy of silence; what dread whim
Was working in him? . . . "Ai! . . ." Out of distance,
dim
At first, half-heard, then lost, then loud, the wail
Of crested warriors coursing a new trail.

Once more the brawl of danger dinned his ears;
Thumped at his heart's stockade. The day flared high
Against the east, ensanguining the spears
Of running hate; out of the western sky,
By the white dunes, seven savage tongues broke cry;
Grim devil brood to hunt him till he fell. . . .
Afeared he fled, and after him came hell.

Exultant whoops were spurs to prick his flesh
With stinging prongs; the pulse's anguished pace
Was molten in his wrist. The bramble's mesh
Clutched him with staying hands; sand whipped his
face
With fiery sleet. Uphill, downhill, by grace
Of fear he led the rout till failing breath
Told him the net was spread, the snare of death.

Death on the flying hour! (How life is sweet
As honey on the tongue: no bitter rind
Crunched in the teeth!) Fantastic in the heat,
Devils danced before—mirage. . . . Devils ran behind
To harry him to darkness; stricken; blind;
To the long silence. . . . Then hope, the subtle lure,
Rose up: the hills! trees dark on the . . . ah! . . . endure!

Endure! Lift up your eyes to the golden hills,
Whence cometh . . . faith. . . . He lifted up his eyes.
Oh, the good refuge: labyrinth of desire; rills
Sweet with cool waters! The mountains' cloudy rise
Beckoned him from despair. . . . Reverberant cries
Of triumph whickered on the air . . . close . . .
close. . . .
Lusting at his heels his savage foes!

Tumult in dream! A long slope led his feet
Toward a crest of shrubs fringing with its screen
The nether country. A tortured mile; the heat
Quivered before his eyes with the arid sheen
Of evil vision. Beyond that wall what green
And lovely land allured? The slope grew stiff:
A half mile now . . . a quarter . . . beyond. . . . What if?

What if . . . beyond . . . beyond the fringing wall
Of scrub and sage flower darkening on the sky . . .
Secure in no dread land. . . . The hedge grew tall.
Two hundred yards . . . a hundred. . . . Bedlam cry
Yelled on the welkin; nearer; clearer; "Ai!
Ai! Ai!" The crest! Jeff tore at the gray sage,
quaking;
His hot heart bursting his ribs, his body aching.

He thrust at the staying branches; cracked through. . . .
God!
Lost at the brink of life! . . . As if a cup
Offered to thirsting lips were broken, trod
To a bitter dust, hope crashed to earth, cool sup
Untaken. . . . Jeff stood stock. . . . As quail rise up
To the step of the hunter, before him warriors rose,
Quiet of death in their throats.

They ringed him close,
Dragged him to earth as out of the thorn fringe burst
A running fury filling the air with cry.
Jeff stared as a biting arrow took the first
Full in the breast. He saw another die,
A warhawk in his brain. . . . So was the lie
Given to his despair. Seven Blackfoot lay
In the ruck of death. He heard a lean voice say:

"We are the Long Knife's friends. Fire Heart, me!
Absaroka! You make the big run, wagh!
The Pahki dogs have die. The Long Knife see
We his good friends. You come to our village. Squaw
Feed you, give you sleep!" Jeff turned and saw
A sight to set his harried heart aquiver
With joy; the Indian town by the dreaming river.

SINGING STAR

Yellow under the sun the desert lay,
Rolling and seamed with gulches, tortured, wry;
Northward the horizon broke to buttes, ash-gray,
Etched barbican and spire on the steely sky;
West, and the Stony Mountains' purple dye
Washed on the sunward glare; the bare peaks stood
White of light on the snow—tall solitude.

By forks of Arrow Creek and Mad Wolf River
Red land lay gashed by ancient waters . . . Where,
In the broad valley leaves of the aspen quiver,
And the bitter cottonwood, and erst the deer
Cropped the lush grass, and the brown beaver's weir
Gave pause to flow of waters, Fire Heart's town
Drowsed in the slanting sun:

Arc of a crown
Broken (by the willow reeds) and the lodges ranged
Horn to horn with the river, a circle's space:
Tipis stained of weather, picture fringed
With painted war (arrowed death, and the place
Of fighting; men like wolves dying, the face
Against the rack of spears) bright symbols, these,
Of valor. . . . A good town, under the windy trees.

"Hoka hey-ya!" wilder than wolf song. "Ha!"
Chant of victory. "We, the blessed ones!"
Aloft, the golden bird looked down and saw
A rout of braves, spears glancing in the sun's

Shrill rays; white water raging over stones,
Their voices: "Hi-ya, this is what we do!"
Scalps fluttered from peeled poles, red-dripping coups.

Now Spirit of the Sun be praised who gives
Benison to his children! Boys and maids,
Mothers and men cried joyful thanks for lives
Of warriors out of battle; blossomy braids
Swayed to the dance in honor of the deeds
Done to the flesh of men—dead—where the sand
Drank of the take of blood in a bitter land.

Night . . . and the stars . . . the medicine man made
voice
To the Holy One, by the sacred cottonwood,
By the balefire's flame; the drum's deep-throated joys
Praised fame among the spears. Ai-yee, ah, good
Beloved Spirit! Where the sun tree stood,
Wild cry on the haunted air, the triumph sang;
Scalps shook on the willow poles; the scalp chant rang.

"Hi-ya! Ho-ya!
This is our song to the Blessed One.
Ha aha, ha aha!
Our enemies are fallen."

Around the sacred flame the women danced;
The tomtoms brayed; the shaken rattles hissed
A venomed laughter; naked warriors pranced
In crazy rigadoon, quick parfleche kissed
The sand to turmoil; dark in the river mist
They circled, crouching to the stalk of prey,
Arrows nocked to the string: "Hi-ya! O-hey!"

"We have spread the feast,
O-hey-ya!
The feast is spread,
O vultures!
The feast is spread,
O dark wings:
Come to the feast,
O swift ones!

"We have spread the feast,
O-hey-ya!
The feast is spread,
O wolf clan!
The feast is spread,
O sharp fangs:
Come to the feast,
O gray ones!"

Nightlong under the going of the stars, they danced
In praise of the Mighty One, the blessed giver
Of victory—men's desire. Fire flame glanced
On the lifted shields, as blood on the windy quiver
Of aspens. Churn of sound: wild song by the river
Dinned on the welkin; the feathered headdress shaking
Like corn to the gale; and the drums; and the echoes
breaking.

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya! and the feast is spread for the
taking! . . ."

The Bear prowled round the Pole as the dancers sped
By the sacred cottonwood. . . . Then Fire Heart spoke:
"The hour grows late; the Long Knife follow!" led
Jeff to a tipi, tall where the council smoke

Smudged on the moon-pale light. A quick smile woke
In his eyes as Jeff paused: "Me the Long Knife friend,
Come!" He lifted the flap with bony hand.

Jeff stepped through the tipi door; his eyes went blind
At clamor of inner flame . . . they took the light
From the weight of shadow. What shadow in the mind
Lingered as dream? Beyond the lodge fire, bright
As diamond, dark eyes; black with a darker night
Braids on firm breasts coiled; warm golden flesh,
Woven of wind and sun; dull beauty's mesh.

Jeff stared: "If'n she ain't *some,* I don't know!"
Soft doeskin moccasins that fit as gloves;
Bright quilled; slim hands, waist jimp and beaded.
Slow
His eyes roved. "Wagh! She shines, now!" Soft as
love's
First whisper were his words. As wings of doves
Over the pools of autumn, her eyes drooped, veiled
Behind dark spaces. . . . Riverward the dancers
wailed. . . .

What tremulous music stirs the wind?
Flute song! bird song!
Low in the ears, Breath-Being-thinned:
Creek song! word song!

Here . . . there . . . a ghost-voice crying,
Weary of the Sand Hills—lost!
Alow . . . aloud . . . where the stars are dying,
Hark! A wandered ghost!

"I have but one love,
And he is near me;
I have but one love,
And he is here.
The heart is a song
The heart goes singing:
Dream again, oh, dream again.
The heart is a dream, the heart goes dreaming,
Oh, hearken to your dream!"

Silence between them was a voiceless song;
Blood thrilled along his veins as water thrills
To the rush of April winds; as a lashing thong
The blood whipped in her breast; as morning spills
Its golden radiance on the darkened hills
Her heart glowed. . . . Fire Heart turned; his quick
glance flashed.
Singing Star crouched under her robe, abashed.

Fire Heart spread his blanket by the hearth.
"Sit!" He motioned. (On the blaze a kettle boiled.)
From skin pouch wrinkled brown as the fecund earth
He drew tobacco with fragrant willow; moiled;
Filled pipe and lit it. The sweet pungence coiled
About his head. "Earth, Heaven, the four winds,
smoke
To say peace dwells here!" Softly Fire Heart spoke.

As one who stares beyond the edge of days,
He stared into the silence, seeking hid
Meaning from life's mysteries, his gaze
Concentrated on the dream. . . . He lifted lid,
Drew meat: "Wind, Sky, and Mother Earth!" he bid
Them eat. Then proffered Jeff the sacred food.
Hunger-quench in the mouth: and it was good!

Ended the feasting, Fire Heart said: "My friend,
These many moons the Absaroka gave
Welcome to the Long Knives; let the end
Be as the beginning; let the Long Knives live
In peace with the Absaroka; let us strive
As brothers, seeing that each of us must go
To the take of years; it is better even so."

And Jeff was made of the Absaroka one:
"You be son of my clan," the Fire Heart said,
"Sealed of the tribe, when comes the next shield moon,
By the test of fire, the wolf's liver; by the red
Of blood mixed in the vein. Ho, fleet as sped
Wind is your feet: Elk Running be the token
To say the Long Knife's name. Ho! I have spoken!"

So he dwelt in that town by the Arrow water.
And they gave him lodge to his sleep (the great robes
taken
Of buffalo in the chase); and they gave of the
slaughter
Of calves to his body's hunger; and cool fruits shaken
From thickets under the dew; from weirs forsaken
By beaver they netted fish of a pleasant savor;
Bladders, they brought, of wine, and sweet of flavor.

Now life was strong in him after the hunt of death;
Feet on the hot sands running, on his neck bone
panting
Breath of hate (where the sun went over), breath
Lewd with the keen of a beast's bite. . . .
His sleep's dream haunting
Eyes the ghost of a flame! He woke to the chanting
Of song in the ears of dawn; he peered from his lodge
To the shape of a squaw's shadow bent to the river's
edge.

Ah-hi! what delight is there in the wind as she stands
Poised by the ripple of stone, clutching a bow,
Bent, nocked of an arrow; the glitter of sands
Under the whimper of water! Ah-hi! crouched low,
Panther in bracken, she waits. Arrow hiss, as the blow
Of wind in the grass, wave stab; red water flailed;
Trout in the take of death—beauty impaled
For the life in the blood of a man! . . .

Jeff watched her turn
To the dress of the game on the white stone. Dawn,
molten glowed;
Mist spiraled skyward. Wrapped in the wet of fern,
Trout on the hot coals cringed. Hunger scent flowed
To the twitch of his nostrils; crave of cooked flesh.
Jeff strode
To the tipi slit. The young squaw, Fire Heart's
daughter,
Bent, red of flame to her cheeks, by the singing water.

She brought the trout, as food to an altar's god,
Smelling of smoke, savored; and she gave him to eat
On the white of clean bark; her eyes to the rue of sod,
Earth cast, silent. Jeff took of the proffered meat,
Thanks from his bearded lips! Lids lifted; sweet
Of smile on vermilioned mouth: she turned and fled
To her father's lodge, as afeared . . . feet of love . . .
sped.

SHORT BLUE MOON

The Moon of Gold passed and the Short Blue Moon
Lingered on scarp and valley; fragile blue
Flooded across the world. Lost out of June
The hours drowsed. Into the cerulean hue
Mountains lifted, shine of the sun on them, grew
On the mind, bright hills of dream. The mule deer ran
To ancient conquest . . . moon of the rutting clan.

The spirit of good days come again, the sun,
Haunted the arc of sky; hazed as with smoke;
Calumet of God. Hours to the darkness ran
With buffalo under the hoof dust; herons awoke
The reeds with southing clamor; the river spoke
Slow words in its place; crows over; dawns returned;
Mirage in dream; the autumn fires burned.

So: and it was in those days as the color of light
Under the lids of the eyes:—dogs scurfed in the dust;
Women fleshing the taut hides, leached to the white
Of ashes; pounding the pemmican; quick to the thrust
Of bone, sewing the tanned skins for lodges (must
Of chokecherry wine on the air)—filled were the days
With squaws' work, busy of locusts—life and its ways.

Their bodies' garments fringed, white-tanned, of hides:
The young girls, firm of breast and strong-kneed, wore
Skillwork of beads, soft doeskin; old women, sides
Soiled of the reek of blood; small children there,
Naked as bronze in the sun; dark warriors, hair

Plumed as the eagle, haughty; sharp lance and bow
A tale of might by the tents; chieftains!
The flow
Of dusk rose like a water to drown the world;
The sun was a fireball, doused; the slow smoke lifted
Into a sky cold orange, pale green, swirled
Like mist in the cottonwoods. The light breeze sifted
In the aspen leaves. Dark coiled. The moon, in a rifted
Cloud, shone on the old trees, arrowed the night
With battle of javelins, thin spears of light.

Jefferson Boone gazed from his tipi door;
The moon poured light into his eyes; the breeze
Laid fingers on his mouth. Lit lodges bore
Burnished amber of lanterns. The glimmering trees
Swayed a blurred fragrance, over. A ghostly peace
Was on the world, vaguely, as some old rhyme
Of dream that will not stay, lost out of time.

What whisper in the silence of his soul;
What phantom from the limbo of spent days
Stood in his heart? What spark from a dying coal,
Once jewel bright, still lingered? Margaret's face
Waned on his memory. Love in that place
Of strife and death, must die. Love lost, hereafter,
Death on the running wind; and dust; and laughter.

He never could return. . . . Some luckier lad . . .
She'd marry . . . married now, perhaps . . . that's
right . . .
Married and happy. . . . He'd not go back . . .
A mad
Wail splintered the thin quiet of the night—
Wolves in the arroyo! Flambeau light

Trembled by the river; a tomtom's beat
Called from the dancing place to nimble feet.

Ah-hi! the young men came as crested cocks;
Maidens, eager for love, with scented hair,
Vermilion-cheeked; lads ran as the coursing fox
To the voices of music, starry, shrilling the air;
Their skins the fragrance of spicewood, slim girls,
where
The kiss of moonfire caught them, they came singing,
Their lips of the mirth of birds, of wild birds winging.

Feast of love! . . . Jeff came to the torches' burning,
Drawn by the throated laughter under the night,
To the whisper of whirring feet by the river's
turning. . . .
Little Bear stamped the earth with a warrior's might;
White Swan swayed as a willow, willow-light,
Bending above cool waters. . . . Maidens danced
With soft-sung praises; wildly the young men pranced.

Dance! Dance!
Dance till you reel,
Dance till earth takes you,
Toe and heel.

Stamp the turf
With a buffalo's thunder;
Shrill your lips
To the cry of wonder.

Kiss your lover
With mouth of fire,
Under the starlight
Sing. . . . Desire

Is pain in the throat:
Bright with the cry
Of dreams in the heart,
Dance . . . till you die.

Fantastic rhythm of tomtoms; singers' drone
Voiced as of many waters; joy on the mouth. . . .
Winged as of wind, Singing Star danced alone,
Secret of love in her eyes; consuming drouth
Of fever. Ai! she whirled as wind of the south
Over the livid plain, her heart a cry:
"Where are you under the night? It is I! It is I!"

A leaf on the wind, she poised before Jeff Boone;
Chosen of men he danced. Her quivering breath
Was woven of moony silver, sinuous tune
Under the aspen shadows. Light as a wraith
She retreated . . . advanced . . . smiled with lips of
faith:
"Is it your feet I hear, beloved?" Laughter . . .
Advance . . . retreat . . . Jeff Boone went shuffling after.

"Well, this shines, or I wouldn't say so, wagh!"
Retreat . . . advance. . . . Jeff's prancing moccasins beat
A grotesque saraband. A hunkered squaw
Cackled a toothless mirth. The tomtom's bleat
Stung the night to madness. Flying feet
Throbbed slower . . . slower . . . paused: "I am here!"
she said.
Exulting, chosen of men, Jeff bent his head

To the burn of her kisses under the mantle's fold.
Her heart was a bird that fluttered its bars, afeared.
"It is I!" Wind in the branches . . . moonfire gold

Pale on the throat. "I ran to find you; heed
The words of my dream; you have come!" Ayee!
greed
Of lips love-thirsted! Ai! as deserts in drouth
Yearn to the rain, so darkly, mouth upon mouth.

THE BUFFALO STONE

The trumpeter swans flew over; wild cranes, south,
Fled from the great white wind; all day, all night.
Geese honked from the rifted cloud. The Giant's
mouth
Whistled a cleansing breath on the desert; bright
The snow on the hills was a blowing dust of light
Spilled from the stars. Frost cracked in the naked trees
As guns in war; creeks in the stinging breeze
Brittled to ice. . . .
So days in the winter's moon
Blew over a bitter country; blizzard of storm
Yelled in the lodgepoles, startling a ghostly tune.
The sun swung north at last; the chinook, warm
With the drift of rains, brought back the northing
swarm
Of wild birds in the reeds; the upland plover
Cried in the pungent dawn. Gentle as a lover
Came the Moon of Flowers. . . .
And so was Jefferson Boone
Made glad for the breaking season: April and May
Spread bloom by the water creeks (wild plum), and
June
Grew with the strength of summer. Day after day
He ferreted his heart, sought out a way
To guide his feet. . . . Decreed: his folks as dead,
White Indian, sealed of the tribe, one with the red
He'd cast his years.
Look now, with Singing Star,
Fire Heart's daughter, for his lodge mate, wagh!

He'd shine—big man in council. (Old love was far
And lost in the ruck of dreams.) What mattered?
Squaw
She was; but young; and pretty as you ever saw;
A good lodge keeper. . . . Life past was a tale
Told to the end, closed book; a darkened trail.

Today is all; today, that is the best!
Yesterday, gone, how many moons remain
(Or few) for this world's living? Since the quest
Is to all men, however wax and wane
The weal that is this earth (let days of rain
Come, or the parching drouth) so would he live
Upon the hour, and on that hour thrive.

Grass grew crisp to the foot; and chokecherries, black,
Fell from the shaken branch by the waterstream
Dwindled to the drink of sun. Dust fogged the track
Of the buffalo herds—dust hovered as a dream
Blown from the challenging hoof; slant fires agleam
On the savage horn. Ho-hey! so were they then
Big for the take of game, the hearts of men.

Hey yoho ho! Hey yoho ho!
They are coming, they are coming;
Over the earth they are coming;
The buffalo are coming.

The white eagle has told it;
The gray wolf has told it—
Over the earth they are coming;
The buffalo are coming.

Make arrows! Make arrows!
Take the bow, O brothers!
Hey yoho ho! Hey yoho ho!
The buffalo are coming.

Fill the air with songs, shout the glad songs,
Let them fly from your mouths like flocks of birds.
Beat the loud water drums, the iron gongs.
To the great Father of life give many words
Of praise that he may send the grass-fat herds,
Food for the Moons-of-Freezing. Hi-ya-hee!
Make good your hearts to Him, great Mystery.

Fire Heart's town was an ants' town, busy of men;
And the crier cried: "Take it down, now; take it
down!
Many buffalo, I have heard, many buffalo!" And
again:
"Your children, keep them. Many buffalo! It is
known
Beyond the Stinking Water; I have heard!" The town
Marched as a nation walking that gray road: so:
"Make haste to the place. Unhee! The buffalo!"

Two days north with the star forced march they made:
Many people in the hot wind and the white dust coiled
A cloud in the sun's rays, bitter with alkali; shade
Scarce in the dry arroyos; the swart flesh soiled,
Salt of sweat on their faces. Northward they toiled
By bitter earth, foot-stirred. Red buffalo stone
They found beside the way—sure fetish known
Of men to bring good luck on the hunting trail.
They danced the Buffalo Dance, young lads and maid,
To the Spirit of the Sun, with frenzied wail:
Fantastic saraband. The Old One prayed

To the Father of good hunting, Man-Afraid,
For power in the chase. Wild cries arose.
The drums were thundering hooves of buffaloes.

"Great golden Father of the Sun, oh, hear!
Good brown Mother of the Earth, oh, hear!
And you, four regions of the singing winds:
Spirit of the East, O Morning Star;
Spirit of the South, O blue flower blowing;
Spirit of the West, O burning heart;
Spirit of the North, O pure of light;
Hear us, suppliant, your hungry children,
That we may find them many, the buffalo!"

The dreamer, Man-Afraid, beat on his drum;
The drum made cry with many voices filled
With memories, with longings: "Maidens, come
To dance round the Buffalo Stone!" The blue air
thrilled
To the wingbone flute. Ai! children's laughter trilled.
"Open your heart to your people's cry; give ear,
Maja-hah-wathus, Man-Alone, oh, hear!"

Northward again: they saw the shadows pass
Of eagles in the sun. At dusk they came
To the valley-of-bad-smelling-water; grass
Lush for the feeding herds. Soon friendly flame
Of campfires starred the dark. Scouts searched the
gloom
For bedded buffalo, under the misty light
Of the circle moon; an owl whooped in the night.

Three leagues they ran the valley and returned
To the waiting clans. The council pipe was lit.
"What have you seen?" Where the sacred fire burned

In the council tipi Fire Heart questioned: "Sit!"
At what place did you see them? Ho-ya! Let
Your words be straight!" "Where the grass is plenty
ho!
Many as the river sands. . . . *Hetchetu aloh!*"

The crier cried as singing: "Let your bow
Be strong, your lance and arrows sharp. Make haste;
Your horse and gun make ready. You shall go
With morning to the slaughter. Ai! the taste
Of sweet flesh on the tongue! Ho, hunters, cast
Out fear; give thanks to the Spirit of the Sky,
Who sends food to his children lest they die."

Darkness crept like a wolf upon the world
As men made ready for the hunt. All night
Totem prayers were chanted; cymbals skirled
Low cries under the stars; from the shadowy height
The wind came, stirring the smoke of sweetgrass, white
As a ghost, to purify the evil heart
In the eyes of gods. . . .

"Go out and see how the stars stand,
Tell us how near is morning."
"It is almost morning."
"Wake up, braves, it is almost morning."

"Go out and see how the stars stand,
Tell us how near is morning."
"The morning star is coming up."
"To the hunt, the morning star is rising."

Dawn's silver-feathered dart
Swooped to the death of dark upon the hills;
Campfires bloomed; squaws shouted; the hour had
come.

Jeff rode with the young men, forth, sweet saddle-bells
Whispering in the wind; the sibilant hum
Of grasses under the horse feet; lips held dumb
Lest alarm take the grazing quarry. Eager eyes
Searched through the growing light for the shaggy
prize.

Slowly they rode and silent, a hundred men.
The sun was a golden pheasant flying; dew
Spangled the grama; from the blue air a rain
Of liquid mirth—the skylark; the blackbird flew
With congaree its word; kit fox and shrew
Fled from the horses' feet; swift antelope
Sped in timorous flight up the flinty slope.

Two leagues: the scouting band paused on a rise;
Beyond, by the Stinking Water, a grassy floor
Dark with the grazing herd. Ai! hungry eyes
Gluttoned upon the feast spread wide before
Them: food for the pinching belly; food galore
For the cooking fires; fat *boudins;* hump ribs, prime
Pemmican—meat of life for the starving time.

Wolf's cry on the mouth, now: "Hoka-hey!"
Shouted as in battle. Hard hooves woke
A galloping clatter; panic of fear; away
Pounded the harried herd; dust as of smoke
Burned from their maddened heels; harsh thunder
broke
From the flying storm. Pursuit! Along the plain
Whirlwind of hunters spitting a murderous rain.

"Surround! Surround! Hoka-hey! Yuhoo!"
Death feathered from bent bows; keen lances bled
Life from the stricken heart. . . . Jeff's mustang flew

Swallow-swift to the slaughter; sure-hoofed; sped
Tailing a sleek bull. . . . Rifle-crash and the red
Welter spilling on sand; reload; again
Spew of hot lead; death—death on the smoking plain!

Men fell unhorsed. A bull with saber horn
Sliced through a broncho's flank; then, mad with blood,
Tossed a stunned rider; bellowed; with frenzy born
Of fear, fire in his eyes and nostrils wide
With vaporous hate, pawed earth. Jeff's mustang shied.
Death's shadow over, Jeff sprawled to the bite of dust;
The maddened bull charged in, doom on the thrust.

Devil spawn he came, a thing of dream.
Jeff groveled from his lunge like a wounded stoat;
His heart shrank in his breast; a quaking scream,
His own, rang in his ears, torn from his throat
In helpless rage. A plunging terror smote
Him; crushed him to the earth, as if a flood
Flowed over him; he felt the pulsing blood
Blundering in his breast. . . .
He rose up; day
Grew out of mist; he rubbed his eyes of dust
And stared around. The charging bison lay,
A crumpled hulk, beside him; fiery lust
Dark in the eyes. Life bled from a lance's thrust.
Little Bear's reeking spear flashed on Jeff's eye.
"Ho!" Little Bear cried. "He almost make you die!"
And he was saved from that death. . . .
Everywhere
Laughter of men for meat, feast after labor;
Meat for the body's need, on the long sand, there
By the river of . . .
Sudden drum on the . . .
tabor

Of hooves on the morning wind! Stilled laughter;
jabber
Of wild surmise: "Hya-a-a!" A rider skied
On a sunward hill: "Pahki! Pahki!" he cried.

"Blackfoot! The town is taken. Come home! Come
home!"
Disaster; mounting of horses; pound of hoof!
"After 'em, boys, for old Green River!" Dome
Of the sky rang to Jeff's call; the shaken roof
Of heaven gave back the rage of warriors. . . . Proof
Of fear gloomed on the welkin; horizon murked
With raddled mist of smoke; there terror lurked.

A long slope clogged the galloping hoof. At last
The crest! As on a map spread Fire Heart's town
By the river's verge; and beyond the river, past
The ford, and toward dim yawning gulches, hewn
Of rains in the northern hills (a land ill-known
Of Crows) the Blackfoot fled; among the rocks,
Lost to the ken of men as the burrowed fox.

Wailing of women rose by the shattered tents.
Gutted lodges blazed. Scalped bodies pressed
The grass in a lonely sleep; blood oozed from rents
Gaping in breast and thigh; slow wind carressed
The cold face of mothers, clay at the breast
The stilled lips of children. Earth was strown
With scurf of tipis pillaged to the bone.

Stunned, Jeff stared on the wreckage, searched the rout
Of bodies for one body, Singing Star;
And found eyes blurred by terror peering out
Of a tumbled tipi—an old man, warrior scar
Blue on his cheek, who mumbled: "They come far,

The Pahki, and they found us; spear and knife,
They drove us and they killed us.
Death in life
They gave to Fire Heart's daughter; only she
Is gone. I heard them come, many as the leaves
Driven by storms in the winter moons. Pahki!
I saw them and I hid." As a gaunt pine weaves
In the gale, his body swayed. "Ai! killers! thieves!
They came among us, so; and we are dead.
They took the Singing Star. Ho! I have said."

LIFE OUT OF DEATH

"My heart is crying for my sister, lost
In the lands of the Pahkuni." Little Bear
Lamented. "Shall we not avenge her ghost?
Or rescue her? The Pahki towns are far
Under the Moccasin Mountains. Singing Star
Calls to her own. Shall we not answer her,
Daughter of my father's lodge?" The anger stir
Drove through the hearts of warriors.

"We are brave,
Men of the Absaroka!" Fighting blood
Surged in young veins (black hatred) as a wave
Released of snow in the sun mounts to a flood
In quiet streams. "It is so! We shall take them war
On the wind of our flying spears. Elk Running, he
Shall bear the pipe. I have spoken. Unahee!"

"Your words are good," said Jefferson Boone, "O son
Of Fire Heart! I will ask for warriors. . . . Ho!
Men of the Absaroka, the Blackfoot run
Home to their holes like foxes. Who will go
To hunt the kit fox? Wagh! my heart is low
For Singing Star. I have said." The young men cried:
"For the sorrow of Running Elk our hearts have died!"

Men mounted for the venture. Squaws wailed; shrill
The echoes cried in the crags. Blackbird, One Eye,
White Shield, Yellow Hawk, Man-Quick-to-Kill,
Two score warriors rode, men willed to die,

On the trail of the marauders. West, the sky
Glowed like a sun-dance fire. . . . Night found them
where
The Beargrass water leaps from the grizzly's lair.

North! And the morning climbed the central sky
Crowning the Shining Mountains; prickly pear
Tortured the running hoof; noon's burning eye
Frowned evilly; the day went out in glare
Of blood on the jagged peaks; the lurid flare
Faded to ashes and the starry band
Wheeled westward, silent, over a silent land.

Dawnlight and dusk, the days and nights crept by
As they rode northward. Beyond Elk River, trail
Grew fresh in a greener country; horizon sky
Bristled with pelt of trees; the intervale
Was pied with myriad blooms. . . . Jeff mused: To fail
Was out of thought; death and its evil grin
Was phantom, laid—he'd cast the dice and win!

They slept; they waked; the trail led over—new
Sign by the Moccasin Mountains; a pleasant land,
Wooded; the air was scented of sweet grass; dew
Sparkled the leaves. . . . Jeff's scouts came as he scanned
The valley reaches; peered under a searching hand
At mist on the far horizon. One Eye spoke:
"It is there, the Pahki town; I have seen his smoke."

Now often as he rode Jeff Boone had made
Deft plan for the taking of the Singing Star
From Blackfoot tipis: he would try the raid
In the secret robe of midnight; he would dare
To break the writhled mesh that bound her there

Lost in the bitter tents of the dread Pahki,
Pasture for their lust: he'd set her free,
Or else. . . .

He turned to Little Bear: "Tonight
Before the moon walks in the sky we go,
You and I alone, for that is right,
To the Pahki town. There we will try to know
What lodge fire warms her, weeping; even so,
There we shall find her, take her. They will sleep
After the dance of scalps; they will dream deep."

Jeff lay in the bracken, all his body tense,
Awaiting the appointed hour; the night wind made
A sound of going in the pine trees; dense
As leaves, the stars swarmed over. Warriors prayed
To the Mystery for good fortune; unafraid,
They faced what fateful chance the hour might bring,
For to the brave death is no evil thing.

With night's adventure they crept to the Pahki town,
Jeff and the Little Bear. The Crow band held
To the darkened ridge. Beyond, the campfires shone
On Blackfoot tents: wildly the marauders yelled
Their scalp song under the stars for enemies felled
By the warhawk's might, the lance's trenchant thrust.
The tomtoms thundered, moccasins beat the dust.

The moon sank slowly beyond the mountain's rim.
Jeff and Little Bear, serpents in the grass,
Slipped to the village edge. Before them, dim
In the glimmering dark a thicket of wild plum (mass
Of shadows) offered haven. Here, to pass
A spying hour, they stole. Secret they lay
Until the ruddy fires should sink to gray.

But where was Singing Star; what tipi hid
Her from their seeking eyes? At last Jeff saw
A pot on a cooking fire, with bobbing lid.
Before the boiling cauldron crouched a squaw,
Whining an eerie chant; he saw her draw
Meat from the pot and carry it to a tent.
She called; a face peered out. Quick joy blent
With rage in Little Bear's eyes:
"Ha, Singing Star,
She there! I saw. Ho, Powers, I thank you! Ho,
Great Mystery, I thank you!" Little Bear
Prayed in his heart. And Jeff Boone: "Wagh! we go
Muy pronto, blast my hindsights, we will so,
For all the dirty hell imps out of hell!"
Scalp dancers shrieked. "Damn, hear the niggers yell!"

The moments crept. . . . Quiet settled on the camp.
An owl cried by the creek like a spirit lost
On the trail to the white Sand Hills. A horse's stamp
Drummed on the turf. A dog prowled like a ghost
Among the lodges. Meteors ran and crossed
Their arrows on the sky. The Warrior climbed
The east with lance of gold and fiery limbed.

Jeff whispered: "I will creep into the lodge
Where lies the Singing Star; if danger comes
You make the song of the croaker in the sedge."
He slid into the night. His blood beat drums
Of pain upon his ears. Cold fear that numbs
The heart with ice, came on him as a dog
Barked by the tents; he lay stark as a log
Felled in the forest.

Quiet returned its sway.
Jeff groped forward; the tipis ringed him round.
He sought the lodge where Fire Heart's girl lay
Guarded by Pahki squaws. The strepent sound
Of sleepers reached him, assured him; yet the ground
Seemed endless 'twixt him and his yearned-for goal.
One spoke in sleep; swift terror took his soul.

With the liquid silver warbling of a lark
Somewhere water sang. The acrid smoke
Of spent fires twinged his nostrils, and from the dark,
Wild rose and sweet grass. A papoose awoke,
Whimpered, and slept. His foot pressed a twig; it
broke
With the crash of guns; peril hedged him everywhere
Crouched to the spring; fear's fingers clutched his
hair.

Before the tipi door he stopped and listened;
Within he heard the muffled breath of weeping.
With sinister glow the dew on the tent flap glistened:
Something of portent was there, some shadow creeping
Across the heart's despair; some warder keeping
Watch within . . . he felt its presence, grim
As fate and desolate; it troubled him.

He slipped inside and let the door flap fall.
None questioned his entry, nobody said him nay.
It was dead dark within save where a pall
Of smoke smudged from a dying hearth fire. Gray
Half-light hovered above still shapes that lay
In tumbled sleep: two gnarled and withered squaws,
Wrinkled as leather, fingers hooked as claws.

His eyes grew keen to pierce the shadows; low
Crouched beyond the hearth he saw her then,
Staring wide-eyed at nothing; her mind crept slow
Back from the dream-of-life, to life again.
Hope flamed: out of the prison place of pain
Rescue had come; Elk Running, he had come.
Jeff stooped to her, pressed her hand, his lips held
dumb.

A squaw turned in her sleep and Jeff fell prone
In the cover of the dew flap. Singing Star
Spread her robe to shield him as the crone
Cackled a challenge. (A coursing wolf howled far
On the western mountain; chanting his song of war
Under the welkin.) Jeff Boone heard her stir
And crane toward his body's grotesque blur.

He lay inanimate until she slept;
Her raucous breathing told him. On hands and knees
Jeff and Singing Star like panthers crept
Silent to the tipi door. The cool dawn breeze
Was running with sweet cries among the trees.
Lightfoot they hastened toward the village edge;
They heard the song of the croaker in the sedge.

They crouched in a tipi's shadow; a moccasin hissed
Nearby to the crush of sand; a man stepped out
Of a lodge into the faint light, gazed on the west
Whence came the wolf calls, yawned, and turned about
To his broken sleep. Jeff felt his good luck flout
Him momently—relent! Onward they ran,
Two wraiths of darkness fleeing the rage of man.

They reached the thicket. . . . Dawn grew along the
east. . . .
Little Bear said: "You have come! Ah, that is good!
You have found my sister; brought her! Now my
breast
That yesterday was filled with mist of cloud
Is glad with singing birds." Silent he stood
Eyes lifted to the great Mystery, giving praise
For the lost one found again. . . .
Jeff's startled gaze
Flashed campward at the sound of voices. Braves
Arrayed for the war trail came from the tipis; strode
To the horse yard singing. Morning's spectral waves
Overbrimmed the sky. A sage cock crowed
Along the slope where lay the only road
Open to the fugitives to the hiding place
Of the Absaroka band. With timorous pace
They hastened toward heart's haven.
Wisps of fog
Gave partial cover from Pahkuni eyes.
They struggled up the slope; a Blackfoot dog
Yammered alarm; the warriors with quick cries
Leaped to their horses, eager for the prize
Of Absaroka scalp locks. Little Bear
Yelped: "Ho-ya! Run! Run! Save the Singing Star;
I will hold them." He fired.

A Blackfoot fell,
Heart-shattered, from his horse. A mad whoop rang
From pursuing braves. The fugitives reached the hill.
An arrow like an angry hornet sang
The song of death; Little Bear staggered. "Dang
My eyes!" Jeff swore. "They got him. Happen one
Will guide him to the spirit land." He pressed his gun
To shoulder.

The rifle spat. A warrior slid
To the bite of dust. Sudden the ringing yell
Of Absaroka; onset of warriors; bid
For the body of Little Bear; braves rode pell-mell,
Raced downward. Blackbird swooped; from the pit of
hell
Lifted the dying, bore him from the fray.
The Pahki howled like wolves reft of their prey.

Horses were brought for Jeff and Singing Star. . . .
The Pahki swarmed like bees from a prodded hive
Up the steep slope. . . . Shunning unequal war,
The Absaroka fled; no man alive
Or dead was left to Blackfoot vengeance. Save
Himself who can! Jeff's warriors galloped south;
Devils of hate sped after, rage on the mouth.

Through the Rock Gate Jeff swept; then cried out:
"Wagh!
Here's place to make 'em die!" The cliffs arose
Sheer as a towered wall. Dark as the maw
Of night was under the pine trees. Crouching close
Among the rocks they waited for their foes'
Adventure; soon with clatter of swift hooves
They came in headlong chase, the Pahki braves.

They reached the pass; a sleet of arrows greeted,
And hot lead singing home; long lances whirled
To the spew of blood; the Absaroka bleated
Exultant glee at Pahki warriors hurled
To the bleak abyss; they shrieked and danced and
skirled
As the enemy fell like leaves in the autumn moon
Or turned and fled in terror.

Jefferson Boone
Could scarce hold back his band from counterchase.
"Brothers," he cried, "we are far in the Pahki land;
We have taken scalps; our town is many days
Journey beyond Elk River, the hills of sand;
We haved saved the Singing Star; I raise my hand
To the Mystery, asking if my words are wise.
We shall ride south. Ho, I have spoken!"
Cries
Of disapproval and approval rose;
But most there longed for home; so, south they turned
To Fire Heart's town; victorious over foes
Left to the wolf and hawk; swart fires burned
Like fever in their eyes. . . . A bright dust spurned
From running hooves, blew south. . . . Beneath the
moon,
Far off they heard the laughter of a loon.

Ai! Ai!
Happily return
Warriors out of battle:
One tall form is gone.
Warriors come from battle,
Yet I look for one!
Ai! Ai!

Ai! Ai!
Sisters, sweethearts, mothers,
They greet them: Oh, not me!
My heart is filled with sorrow—
Warriors home from battle,
One I do not see.
Ai! Ai!

Ai! Ai!
Men of the Absaroka,
Hearken to my pain:
One rode forth to battle,
Where is he, O warriors?
He rides not home again!
Ai! Ai!

The blood-red day died slowly on the west,
As the war band came again to Fire Heart's town
With Singing Star; proud warriors from the quest
Of beauty and of death: but there was one
Who would ride no more with men, his dark dust
blown

On Pahkuni winds. . . . From his tipi Fire Heart came:
His eyes took frozen light at a well-loved name
Wailed by the lodges . . . Little Bear!
Hands of pain
Clawed at his breast; his ears ached to the cry
Of Singing Star mourning her brother, slain;
Lonely of heart, he stood, with empty eye
Staring at nothingness, his soul leached dry
As desert sand . . . he cringed as to the gash
Of knives, as to a scourge's fiery lash.

Vaguely he heard the Wise Ones, who made talk:
"Absaroka, this was a brave man, ho!
A warrior with strong heart; let your feet walk
In the way his feet have walked; let your hearts go
On the trails his heart has gone! Ho! may you know
The love he held for this land, this ancient sky,
And like him, live for them, and like him, die.

"Hold dear his memory, that he may return
From the Land of the Evening Mirage, on rainbow
wings
To hover on the winds of dawn; from flowers that
burn
With light, sip honeyed wine! As birds that sing
Praise to the Mystery, as creeks in spring,
That chant to Wakan with a shining voice,
Honor him in his worth, let your hearts rejoice!"

And he heard the words of warriors and the drums
In triumph and despair: "Hai! Man-Alone,
Maja-hah-wathus, aid him: flesh that crumbs
To mold, remember: oh, lonely shadow, flown
To the Spirit Country: Hai! his axe has known

The taste of Pahki blood. . ." so did he pray.
The scalp song cried in the wind: O-hoka-hey!

"North: in the northland Pahkuni have fallen,
The hearts of the Blackfoot are dust in the path;
They weep for their braves, their women are
weeping
For warriors cut down by the lance of our wrath.

"We have taken our own from the tents of
Pahkuni:
Singing Star, daughter of Fire Heart, ho!
Their scalp locks are blown in the wind of our
riding;
Their blood stains the prairie as waters that flow.

"To the land of the Darkness their spirits go
wailing;
Their bodies are food for the wolf and the hawk;
Their hair we have taken, their strength we have
taken;
Hi-ya, ai-hee! they are ghosts where they walk."

Days passed; woe-clouded days; four mornings
bloomed
Like ghost flowers on the world; four evenings paled
To haunted dark. By his hearthstone Fire Heart
gloomed,
Heavy with sorrow for his lost son, trailed
By death on the Starry Road. Forlorn he quailed,
Lone in a lone land, questioning impotently,
The inscrutable shadow of the years to be.

Four days the women mourned the earth-trapped one;
Wept in anguish for the untimely slain.

Singing Star prayed to the great father, Sun,
To bless him where he wandered in the rain
Of darkness to the Ghostland; with heart of pain
Burned sweet grass to the Mysteries for the rest
Of his soul in that far country of the west.

"This offering, behold it!
Man-Alone, behold it!
This offering I burn,
This sweet smoke I am sending,
To rest his ghost, behold it!
A sacred praise I make,
Behold it now in kindness,
Make smooth his way to the Ghostland,
Make bright the Spirit Trail
To lead his feet.
O Great One,
Maja-hah-wathus!
A sacred praise I make,
A sacred praise, behold it!"

When the fifth-day sun heaved skyward Fire Heart sent
For Jefferson Boone. (Swart sadness seamed his face
With lines of eld.) Jeff found him in his tent
Where he sat with troubled heart. "Son of my race,
Blood of my blood," he said, "now is your place
Beside me here. . . . By many trails men go
To the one trail walked of all; it is even so.

"My son, I had a dream; three times I dreamed:
I stood upon Cloud Peak; I saw the plain
Spread like a painted war robe. There, it seemed,
Below in bitter strife the tribes of men
Contended; arrows flew in a feathered rain.

Lacota, Grovan, Sioux, Ree, Pahki, Blood,
Pawnee, Shian; there rode a raging flood
Of fighting men;
Nations of the earth, allied
To whelm the Absaroka in their flow.
Our warriors were beset from every side.
Then a cloud crept from the east, streaked with the
glow
Of leaping fire; the wind began to blow
A murk of dust and out of the dustwind came
A storm of pale-faced riders armed with flame.

"The nations surged, but the pale men were as rock
To the onset; and our tribe was saved that day. . . .
The pale ones charged; the nations, to that shock
Were leaves in the wind of autumn whirled away
To forgotten mold. Ho! riding a stallion, gray
As stone, the war chief came, tall as the sun;
And his voice was the thunder's voice, that mighty one.

"His eyes were darting stars, his face the pale
Swift morning light, his hair was the comet's plume;
His horse's hooves were war drums on the trail
Of the fleeing nations. Then Absaroka came
With axe and spear to slay; their arms grew lame
Wielding the lances. . . . The Pale One led them there.
Hai-ya! the eagle feathers in his hair.

"Thus was it that I dreamed; three times I dreamed . . .
And it is so: you are the pale-faced one
Who came to help my people. (Eagles screamed
Before your riding.) Behold it, O my son!
You shall lead my people when I have gone
The Star Trail; so will Absaroka be
Strong in war, beloved of Mystery."

He spoke again: "From Maja-hah-wathus, know
All good and evil come, and give him praise
That we are still on this world: men must go
As stone and standing hills; remembered days
Are few and darkened and the seeking gaze
Sees only cloudy dreams; our body's breath
Is quarry in a chase, the hunter, death.

"Empty of joy my heart lies on the earth
Trampled by feet, my son reft from my side;
My fire is only smoke; no longer mirth
Flies from my lips. Ai-hi! my heart has died
On Pahki spears; my lodge is fallen; wide
My leaves are whirled, my ancient branches sere;
My life is a whithered tree. Elk Running, hear!

"My snows are many; Little Bear is no more;
The son of my clan shall be my son indeed,
To guard my lodge, my people. . . . You who bore
My daughter from Pahki tipis; you who bled
On Pahki arrows; whose thunder iron sped
Pahki ghosts on the death trail in that war,
Shall take into your lodge the Singing Star.

"So, in the veins of warriors, Fire Heart's blood
Shall never die; you shall renew his sons
On earth. Ho! Maja-hah-wathus, it is good!
My life shall flow as long as water runs.
I thank you, Father! Ho, Mysterious Ones,
I thank you! May his feet with joy be sped;
Wash his heart in wisdom. . . . I have said."

He spoke to the Singing Star: "My daughter, go
And sit on our brother's blanket." She obeyed
The fiat of her father's words, her feet held slow.

Brought to decision, Jeff Boone groped, dismayed,
Searching his inner being, half-afraid
To front his fate. He pondered: the trail ran dark
Through unfrequented valleys, no signs to mark
The way before him. . . .
Wagh! his sight wasn't bad,
He knew that bear was bear a long mile off;
That blacktail deer weren't white tail; that a mad
Wolf wasn't a fireside tyke; no one could scoff
At his eyes on an Indian track; nor any laugh
At his skill with a beaver trap; damn, he could throw
A buffalo with every shot, well, he could so.

He knew bull from fat cow, or ought to could;
Could guess a thing or two; but this here, now,
It had him tree'd for certain. Well, he would
Take his time to answer. Anyhow
You looked at it 'twas puzzling. He set his jaw.
He wasn't a kit to be fooled. He thought delay
Might solve the riddle, so he sought delay.

"My heart mourns for my brother. I would wait
The full moon before I answer," he said, "till sign
Of the stars is fortunate. The hour grows late;
I would seek my tipi that my prayers may gain
The ears of the Secret Ones; so may the plain
Trail lead my feet. . . . I would listen to the voice
Of Wakan that my heart once more rejoice!"

MY HEART WITH YOURS

I have searched for you in the East Wind,
Where the Morning Star
Burns its shining torch by the long blue waters;
Beyond the River of Morning I have sought you;
You have taken my heart,
O pale one!

I have searched for you in the South Wind,
Where the Golden Flower
Blooms on its stem of light by the yellow waters;
Beyond the River of Midday I have sought you;
You sing to my heart,
O pale one!

I have searched for you in the West Wind,
Where the Flaming Tipi
Glows as a lodge fire by the crimson waters;
Beyond the River of Evening I have sought you;
You dream in my heart,
O pale one!

I have searched for you in the North Wind,
Where the Giant One
Breathes his frosty breath on the snow-white waters;
Beyond the River of Midnight I have sought you;
Your lips melt on my heart,
O pale one!

I have searched for you in the four winds,
Where Maja-hah-wathus
Dwells in his sun-bright lodge by the rainbow waters;
Beyond the Rivers of Birth, Life, Love and Death;
My heart with yours forever,
O my pale one!

Hunger and thirst and dream, the years had gone
Winging above Jeff's life like a flight of crows
Down a dim sky: old memories had grown
Less and less in his heart with the passing snows;
Old beauty had faded to a mist that blows
Across a sleep; old love was a taper's light
Burned to the wick, doused in enormous night.

Yesterday! . . . How much of boding doom,
And longing lingers in the word! Delight
Is a wind blown over; summer's fleeting bloom
Lost under the winter's dearth; the transient white
Flower of day fades to the frosty blight
Of darkness. Yesterday . . . far off . . . a dream
Dreamed long ago, under the magic beam
Of other stars in a land forgot. . . .

Today—
Forever! Let the dead past bury . . . so! What power
Can call the morning back? Who can delay
The running feet of time? What withered flower
Recall lost fragrance? What use is it to cower
From the radiance of new day immured in pain,
Because old laughter will not come again?

Ancient desire had died these many moons;
She had forgotten him . . . His life was here,
These were his people. Out of the night white runes

Of mountains whispered to him; low and clear
The aspen wind breathed music; the beaver's weir
Purled to drowsy waters—here was his land:
These knew him, loved him; these could understand
The gray wild goose in his heart. . . .

In the moonlight
He wandered by the murmurous river. Wars
And death were far away; and life grew bright
With a new loveliness. The Seven Stars
Dipped to the northern earth; and the moon was white.
Vaguely he felt a presence in that place
Of mystery; a warm hand touched his face.

Out of half-sleep he turned to find the girl
Phantom-like by his side. What thing of bane
Possessed him? Light as breath feathers that swirl
Aloft when no wind blows, she stepped. Again
She touched his cheek; she smiled to see the wane
Of shadow from his eyes, the fire renewed,
Of life. . . . Ho! Maja-hah-wathus, he is good!

Her love was steel to strike an answering spark
From the flint that was his heart. A subtle glow
Grew in his breast, enkindling the dark
Labyrinth of his being; delicious flow
Of bright pain flooded him, to the overthrow
Of that old rapture beyond the taking years. . . .
His lips burned on her lips as flame that sears.

His arms enfolded her; a luminous cloud
Canopied their love. A timorous bird
In a snare of osier, her lips, as half-aloud,
They breathed his name; her golden pulses stirred

With the throb of singing drums. Faintly Jeff heard
The whisper in her veins. She laid her head
Joyous upon his breast.
Jeff laughed and said:
"You were as the cunning lynx, so soft you crept."
She smiled again and gave him slow reply:
"Your spirit was far off; even had I stepped
As buffalo you'd not known that I was by;
Your eyes were asleep, your ears dead; panther cry
Would not have wakened you. . . . Did you dream of
me?"
"I dream of you much!" he said; then, ardently,

"I await our marriage as the drouth the rain!"
"And I," she murmured happily. "I shall be
A good wife; I shall love you." And again:
"Many children I shall bring you. Mystery
Bless us! No other warrior can I see
Above the feet. . . .
My spirit song is high;
The bird in the wind is not so glad as I."

Margaret arose with dawn to the dreary round
Of old endeavor. Outside the naked boughs
Of fruit trees, like taut strings, hummed with the sound
Of harps along the wind; in dark carouse
Clouds whirled across the sky; then came the snows
In a blinding smother to blot the reeling day
With flying feather flakes; the hours flowed gray
To the night's oblivion.
With darkness came
New power to the desolate wind; malignant war
Raged at the cabin roof. The timorous flame
Trembled on the hearth. Battering at the door
With spiteful fists the storm boomed, swirling the frore
Frost to the revel of ghosts; a plaintive wail
Cried at the window, sobbed in the chimney.
Pale
In the glow of a tallow-dip Margaret sat alone
Spinning the yellow flax; deaf to the click
Of the clock reel, the wheel's low beelike drone.
Her body rested quiet, despite the quick
Feet on the treadle, in a seeming sleep. . . . The thick
Flakes pelted on the pane and ran like tears
Of old love sorrowing for the vanished years.

The treadle creaked, the wheel whirred, she sat tense,
Her eyes on the flaxen web that looped her thought
In its gray-golden spirals, entwining her sense

In a net of dreams, until all her days were caught
In its skein to a swift revealing: happiness fraught
With pain, lost laughter, and the lingering dread
Of loneliness: so, life! a spinning thread.

The fire leaped starlike as an ember fell
With a stir of sparks; the polished pewter shone
On the cupboard shelves, and the copper that her skill
Had burnished; the hanging clock, with a strident tone,
Cuckoo! Cuckoo! spoke. Margaret raised a wan
Face to its word. The wind shrieked at the wall
As a voice in the night; Margaret startled to its call.

She cosseted the fire, then pulled her chair
To the faggot warmth; stared into its ruddy blaze
As though ensorceled; the firelight in her hair
Was elfish shine and shadow. Her vacant gaze
Took vision in the fire: on outland ways
One walked who was a ghost, in a delicate mist
On the frozen edge of dusk; love's song was whist
On his mouth, death-stilled.
And into her dreaming came
The ghost one, strong and beauty-proud, and stood
Upon a naked hill. He was a flame
Coiling above the world to sear the blood
With precious pain; his dark eyes were a flood
Of flashing stars; he was crested with the glow
Of sunset . . . and beside him one crouched low
And golden as a cloud.
He turned and saw
Margaret where she watched by the darkening east;
His hands reached to her; she marked that other draw
A shroud of shadow round him; all the west
Blew with a mist. . . . Once more the loud night pressed

Upon her like death's doom; once more love's fears
Thronged from the keep of the unforgotten years.

Margaret arose and stirred the dwindling fire,
Then spread the table against the evening meal.
The storm mourned in the eaves like a haunted choir
Of demons lost from hell: with bedlam squeal,
Clutched at the streaming panes.... Sudden a heel
Crunched snow, a piggin rattled; at a muffled shout,
The cabin door clanged open to the madding rout.

Matt Byrne staggered in, benumbed of ears,
Blowing his nails, his breath a spout of steam.
"Dad burn this hell-fer-weather!" he swore. The
tears
Of snow dripped from his beard in a tiny stream
Of water drops; his eyes blinked to the beam
Of the tallow dip: "Reckon she's thirty below;
Coldest I ever see." Then pondering slow:

"I've had enough of this country, hark ye, Peg;
I'm honing for summer doings. Oregon!
Sho! there's a land, seest ye, rich as a keg
Of long sweetening, so they tell." His voice ran on:
"Times is bad, work scarce; a many's gone
Out yan a'ready. Happen with the rest,
Come spring days, we will be agetting West.

"Appleseed John, remember him years agone,
Telling of Pacific lands? Yan is the place
For we'uns, now; Missoura state, she's done
And gone to pot; my feet hone for the Trace
Upriver bound." He paused and turned his face
Toward the door, ahark. Margaret raised her head:
Happen I heard somebody call," she said.

"Reckon it's the post along St. Charles road,"
Matt answered. The murmur died upon the air;
The wind paused whist. The firelight dimly glowed.
Once more the wind woke tumult; everywhere
In wild stampede. And Margaret whispered: "There!
Someone is lost, I heard him call again."
She shaded her eyes against the frosted pane.

A sudden knock drummed on the cabin door.
"For the mercy of Jesus, open and let me in;
I've lost my way. For God's sake, quick, afore
I freeze!" A hoarse voice cried. Matt felt his skin
Prickle as he pulled the latch. Frost burned and thin,
An apparition entered, a man of snow,
And crouched like a famished beast by the hearthfire's
glow.

"I was lost," he muttered, "I saw your window. Damn!
Hellish weather! Where have I come?" He turned
Questioning, then rambled on: "Now, hark'ee, Ma'am,
I've trod a right smart journey." His keen eyes burned
With a feverish light. Margaret discerned
His need and hasted to brew a pot of tea.
"From Oregon, as ever was, Ma'am, yes sirree!"

"Happen you'd like some tea to warm you, now?"
She queried, "And a bit to eat?" "How can I set
Drinking of tea with the news I'm carrying? How
Can I dawdle here when it's sartin I ought to get
To San Louiee quicker nor hell, Ma'am?" Margaret
Soothed his frenzied spirit: "Yes, you may go
In the morning. Pappy will carry you down there."
"Sho!
That's white of him, Ma'am."

"You've come from Oregon,
You say?" Matt asked. "Well, now, I aim to go
Out yan come spring. Dad burn me, I am done
With this here country. Winters it's frost and snow
To freeze a body; summers the river's flow
Drowns half of my acres; taxes take the yield
Of them that's left: poor corn in a weedy field."

Then the stranger: "You're right, Mister, get you
West:
To Oregon! God's country! Yan's the trail,
Many an arrow's flight beyant the crest
Of the Stonies and the Wallaways. Brother, hail
The day with singing! D'ye own a wagon? Tail
Your oxen to the West: to Oregon!
Yan's country, Mister, finest aneath the sun."

Margaret thrilled to the strange words in her ears:
Wakarusa, Laramie, South Pass, Green,
The River Saptin, Tetons. . . . Unshed tears
Memorous of old days were lucent sheen
In her eyes, for ecstacy that might have been,
Lost now forever . . . "Finest ye ever saw . . .
And some is prairie . . . Beyant the mouth of Kaw. . . .

"Two thousand miles to go there, as I tell:
The Stony Mountains, and beyant the mountains, sage
And the sting of sand to the feet, the fringe of hell
Howsom'er; and beyant, more mountains and the rage
Of rivers; and the final mountains, as 'twere a hedge
Set down by the western sea; and between the hills,
Meadow and woodland; beasts; and the singing of
rills. . . ."

"A Promised Land, whatever!" Matt whispered.
"Growth
Of grain is a marvel there: wheat horse-head high,
Or I'm a lying nigger. And trees with the blowth
Of April on them, crab and wild plum; and the cry
Of birds with summer aneath them; hark'ee, now,
sky
Blue—as your eyes, Ma'am; a sweet land, yes sirree,
Waiting ye, Mister, ayan by the western sea."

"It's a way to go," Margaret murmured, "a long, far
way!"
"But the end is reward aplenty, a paradise
As ever was!" He answered, the dream in his eyes.
"Eden and the Eden tree! And the sarpent? Say!
The sarpent were left out! The Lord were wise
When he dreampt that land; His were a smiling face
When he made it, on world's edge; a garden place!"

"I mind John Appleseed told of a vale,"
Matt said a word: "Tuality's the name
He called it: meadowland, he said, and dale,
And woodlots here and yan; and wilden game,
Bushcock and fallow deer and elk beasts, tame
As cows, now, hark'ee! There's where I aim to go
And carve me out a farmplace, I do so!"

"A-sartin," the stranger searched his memory,
"I seen that valley: I recollect, one time
Beyant Multnomah River, a two or three
On us were trailing; we came there, birds achime
In the tree-blowth. Pretty as a picture. Grass were
prime,
And flowers scenting the wind. . . . Well, Mister, there
'S homeplace to pleasure a man, now, I declare. . . .

"Likely rivers, yan: River of the West,
Deep for ocean ships. . . ." His wandery mind
Looked to its dark meanders in slow quest
Of words to name that beauty; failed to find
Them to his tongue; he stared on the fire with blind,
Dull-seeming eyes; then spoke as out of dream:
"It flows from the Shining Mountains; a bounteous stream!"

The fire fell dark; the chill crept; in the trees
The storm was a dolorous crying. They sought their beds.
The shadow was bright with dream-built pageantries:
Pictures of the promised land flitted in their heads
In delectable rout—farmlands and grassy steads
Beyond the deserts of sunset; wheeling light
Leading them under the dayshine, under the night.

O stormwinds ablow
From the west of the world,
What beauty is hurled
On the white-feathered wings of your flying?
What syllables, dying
On silence like a song long ago. . . .
White winter, white trees:
Not these, oh, not these
She remembers, but bird-mad green forest alleys,
Darst Hill at dusk, and the warm golden valleys
Of April; above,
The white star of love,
Like a bright lanthorn lighting the path for her feet.
Oh, dark ways of sleet,
And still drifted frost,

Sad for the going of love, and love's ghost
Lost! Lost!
White season, oh, sing
With your cold lips of wind,
In the black branches thinned
Of catkin and leaf;
Blow on the frost-curled bud of her grief
With your mellowness, sting
It to the rapturous blossom, the laughter of
spring!

The clock of the year ticked slowly toward April days;
The sun came from the south to warm the earth
To new endeavor; the snow down runneled ways
Fled from its ardent kiss; the ashen dearth
Of winter yielded to the warbled mirth
Of birds, and wildwood blows—dogtooth and thorn,
Eyebright and violet, herald-of-the-morn.

The day of April Margaret sought the spring
Beyond the clover field: Pete Journey's cows
Fed on the sunward slopes; birds, caroling,
Rollicked along the hedges. She heard them sing:
"Fool! O April fool! Love and love's vows
Unmemoried are not love. Love is a tool
To break the heart. O fool! O April fool!"

Among the budded twigs the wind blew shrill
And warbled song across the April skies,
And frolicked with the wild flowers on Darst Hill,
And ran across the grass with little cries:
"O love that is not love! O love that dies
When the loved one dies! O love: not any school
Can teach the heart to love! O April fool!"

And the waters of the creek laughed where they ran
Among the staying stones, the murmurous reeds;
And the water spoke with voices (the new sun
Asparkle in slow pools) then hurried on
To the tale of gold and dark, and the valorous deeds
Of love and love in death: "Oh, cool, so cool
Is death to the lips of love! O April fool!"

And Margaret heard the voices as they cried
To the stone that was her heart. The teeming sod
Breathed essence of renewal: dressed as a bride
The haw tree starred the shadows of the wood.
Beyond the creek Hugh Harlan's ox team trod
The plowlands toward bright harvest. . . . Slow she
turned . . .
Her feet in the homeward lane. . . . The daystar
burned . . .

Chloe Boone rode down from Pigeon Creek;
Trilled to the catbird's song beside the Trace;
Pennons of light shook in the trees; low craik
Of geese came to her. She cried Matt's cabin place
From the road, then laughed with quick fun as a face
Peered from the dog-run. Beside the laylock bush
She reined her pony. . . . The dusk-wind whispered:
hush!

In the pasture lane a chime of cow bells rang
A lin-lin-lone! "Why, Margaret, I declare,
Such a fine-pretty picture, now; ju' like a spang
New print from Godey's, honey! Sho! A-where
You wandering this bright eve?" The laylock tang
Scented the dusk. Margaret smiled: "Afore it's done
Happen a long, far ways . . . to Oregon!"

"Oregon? Do tell!"
"Pap's bound to go
Out yan come Monday-week: first train, he says,
From Liberty. He reckons it's better so. . . .
I'd just as lief. . . . This place, the length of days
Are so long ever. . . . My life's all jagged, someways,
And ravel edge. . . . But land sakes, light and set;
You're tuckered striding that horse-beast, now, I bet."

Chloe slipped to the horse block. "I could prance
To Oregon along of you. Pap's enough as 'tis
To fend on his downgone farm." Her eyes adance:
"I got it in head to do so. . . . Hark'ee, Sis,
It's what I'll do!" With a heart-warming kiss
She sealed the pact. "I'll ride my Bess," she said.
Visions of unknown wonders thronged in her head.

Soon was a roll of wagons on the Trace:
A gathering of the clans for the outward way,
Drifted stars in the eyes, glow on the face
Of sunset gold. . . . The nights drew down to the gray
Smoke of smoldering campfires. . . . Came the day
Of outland going: "Good-by! Good-by!" Quick
jest . . .
Slow furtive tears. . . . "Ho! Gee-up, lads, get West!"

And a grist of families rode from Femme Osage,
The red dust under the wheels: gay, footloose lads;
Men with their wives and children: Old Bill Page
From Charette way; Dave Bryan with his tads,
A ten or twelve; and Jonathan Colby, adze
To hew a way for pilgrims; Jeremy Pinch,
The widowman; and the boatman, Michael Finch.

Abraham Musick carried the word of God
In his saddlebags; the heathen for to save!
Came Matthew Farmer, whose sturdy feet had trod
The dust of Bunker Hill; Gabriel Musgrave;
Dupré St. Clair, from Frenchman's Hollow, Dave
Darst, with his singing fiddle; and Barney Stagins,
Molder of iron—on the trail of the western wagons.

Early in the dawn where the dewsmoke drifted
White along the clover, and the redbird's wonder
Flashed among the haw trees, and the slow sun lifted
Above the greening woodlands, argosied with plunder,
Conestoga wagons rolled into the west,
Driving toward the sunset. . . . Eager for the quest
Were the gaunt men prodding the bull teams, plodding;
Haw bucks crying: And a fare-you-well!
We're bound to get to Oregon—Oregon . . . or hell!
Western wagons, roll along to Liberty!
West, to the West: Oregon or bust!
West! West! on to Independence. . .
Wakarusa . . . Big Blue. . . . God is our trust!
Wagons from New England, some from Boston Bay;
Jersey shore; Penn's wood; and up York way;
From the Old Dominion; the Dark and Bloody
Ground. . . .
Get along, bullies, we are outward bound.
Rolling wheels, rolling wheels, rolling with the sun,
Rolling on to Liberty . . . on to Oregon.
West! West! toiling to the hillcrest;
The long whips snarl and the bulls' feet drum;
West! West! down along the valley;
Rolling wheels, rolling on to Kingdom Come.

Beyond the crossroads, beyond the fields
Green with the promise of autumn yields;
Beyond the pastures, and the apple trees;
Beyond the murmur of flower-seeking bees;
Beyond the last of the backwoods farms,
The watchdogs' yammering alarms;
Beyond the river, and the river wood;
The buffalo plain, and the solitude
Of sage and stone and sandy dune—
Beyond the Mountains of the Moon!
West . . . from the old lands . . .
Wagons west!
On to Oregon:
There we rest! . . .
New lands, yonder, where the last sun dies,
Ruddy as a bloody scalp spread against the skies;
Wagons to the sunset; the white dust spurns
From hooves plod-plodding; the great earth turns
Wheeling west to Oregon—Oregon the blest . . .
Got to get to Oregon;
Free land in Oregon;
Kingdom Come in Oregon;
Empire of the West!

THE MOCCASIN TRAIL

By Redstone Creek Jeff Boone made winter camp
With Meek and Markhead, Carson and a score
More rangers of the far trails. In a clump
Of cottonwood, crouched like partridges in the frore
Wind from the long plain swelling, brown lodges bore
The brunt of frost. Far-stretched on every side
The glitter of snow: men gazed on it aching-eyed.

Feet whined along the swales; beside the creek
The horse-herd cropped, in wind-bared sloughs, the dearth
Of herbage. From the huddled tents a quick
Flurry of laughter stirred; by the smoking hearth
Trappers played at sledge. Their gusty mirth
Shrilled momently, dropped silent. The white land
Lay naked and chill in the day as an ungloved hand.

Above the cluster of lodges the smoke plumes drifted
Into the sky's pale azure. Through the rush of air,
Bright from the welling heart a low voice lifted
A song to the gods of earth, a chanted prayer
Of beneficence for the man-child dreaming there
On the cradleboard, by the hearth warmth comforted:
"Oh, kind Mysterious Ones, bless him!" she said.

"Ho! Little Eagle, warrior soon," she smiled.
"Great chief of the Absaroka: it is so!
Many buffalo he will kill: great hunter! Wild
As storm he will strike the Pahki; they will go

Running to the Land of Ghosts, because his bow
Is strong, his arrows swift!" Singing Star sang
Praise to the gods. . . . New brawl of laughter rang
From the trappers in the tents.

Jeff brooded there
Before his lodge-fire flame: (a lobo cried
His hunger from the waste; a strepent flare
Of howls from the dogs gave angry answer, died
On a stir of wind) sprawled indolent, he eyed
The sparkled coals and in them seemed to see
The pageant of old days, and days to be.

Life was a moving shadow show that passed
In slow review: his home at Pigeon Creek;
His brothers, sisters, father, his mother, cast
In dark relief; his gran'ther, like a peak
Snow crowned above the lonely hills, his cheek
Bitten by the years of storm. . . . Old Boone, Dan
Boone
Stood in his vision; his eyes were an ancient rune
Luring the outland heart. . . .

The fire dwined
To ruddy ash: then in his dream came one,
Proud-hearted, laughing; something of the wind
Was in her laughter; the color of the sun
Burned in her hair; mocking; he saw her run
At dusk to the meadow gate, her blue eyes glancing
With light of love; he saw her (bittersweet) dancing
In the arms of another lover. . . .

Hell! he spat
In the fire and shook him free of dreaming. . . . Came
Singing Star to mend the blaze. . . . Why pine for that

Lost other world? Life's here and now. The game
Is on the boards, cards dealt. Why should a name
Remembered conjure his thoughts to the sting of dream
And vast regret? . . .

He startled to the scream
Of moccasins crunching frost. The door flap lifted.
Joe Meek stooped through the slit with a grunted:
"How!"
"How! Sit and smoke!" Jeff invited. Breath fog
drifted
Above them. "Well, I reckon not just now.
I came to tell as yan from the south'ard brow
Of Blackhawk, as I trailed from trap, I saw
A grist of hosses and men down Piney draw
A-cootering this-away."

"Red skin or white?"
Jeff questioned. "What's the sign? How many's the
lodge?"
"Wagh! now, I can't right say, me; but heap sight
More'n's comfortable, hark'ee, Jeff! I'd better budge
Along and scout 'em out." He began to edge
Toward the tipi door. "Wagh! I'm half froze for
fight!
Hark, lad, we'll make 'em come, if it's Blackfoot!"
Grudge
Of hate swelled in his breast.
The trappers flocked
From the tents as a squaw cried out: "Pahki! Pahki!"
Dogs snarled a bristling challenge: panic stalked
Through the camp. "*Les* damn *sauvages!*" Old Jules
squawked.
"Injun! *Les Pieds Noirs!* Ah, *bon sacré!*"
Slowly the strangers came. . . . Then Carson said:
"White men, or I'm a coon!"

A huge man led
The van: dark-bearded, hawk-nosed, flashing-eyed!
An eight or ten strode after. The tall one spoke:
"Happen we can squat with you-all here, and bide
The days gin winter breaks?" "A-shorely!" cried
Markhead. "Right welcome!" Memory awoke
In Jeff at the stranger's voice; his brain whirled, tossed
In a storm of doubt. . . . Rube Herring! . . or his ghost!

Rube Herring! Here! Alive!
"Well, damn my eyes!"
The words boomed on Jeff's senses. "Wagh! Jeff
Boone,
Or I'm an Injun nigger!" Stunned surprise
Held Jeff in swarthy hands. Pale as a bone
And staring-eyed he stood there, as though hewn
Of rock; and then his wits returned. . . . "Not
dead! . . .
I can go back! . . . Kit, hark'ee!" He shook his head
Free of its daze.

Then: "Hell! I saw ye die
That morn, by Tavern Rock!" Rube Herring laughed:
"Not by a jug of brandy. I well nigh
Passed in my checks, for sartin," he lightly chaffed,
"But what's a pill like that?" His great mouth quaffed
The frosty air, like wine. "Now look'ee, son,
I've news 'twill tickle your ears afore I've done."

He turned to his brigade: "Now, lads, set up!
Here's camp for a spell of weather." To Jeff: "Let's
walk;
I've words I hanker to tell." A hungry pup
Whined in a tipi; the frayed tag ends of talk
Raveled to silence. Westward a sparrow hawk

Gloomed on the evening sky. By the horse corral
They stopped and leaned on the poles. Jeff querried:
"Well?"

"Damn!" Rube swore. "I ain't much for to say;
Mebbe I shouldn't say aught. But one ye know
Is honing her heart for some'at; or leastaway
She were three years agone. . . . Since long ago
'Tis known who she's breaking her heart for. Let ye go
Missoura way, come spring; wagh! Jeff Boone, let
Your feet stray homeways; she's waiting there—
Margaret!"

Jeff echoed: "Margaret!" Rube paused at the word,
Resumed: "I've trailed ye a far ways since I come.
I packed to Laramie, Christmas: there I heard
Ye wintered in Bighorn lands." Jeff listened dumb;
His thoughts a seething brew, moiled with the scum
Of pain and old desire . . . then: "Margaret,"
He heard Rube Herring say, "she's waiting yet."

Margaret Byrne . . . Margaret Byrne . . . the name
Chimed in his ears, a music of lost days . . .
O hair the color of light, the color of flame
Blowing in the April wind! O heart amaze
With life! O laughing eyes, blue with the haze
Of dreams! O lips that smiled, that mocked his love!
He'd forgotten once, he'd forget again. . . .

Above
The sky brimmed with green fire as the slow sun dipped
Beyond the Shining Mountains. Mules champed the
stark
Rind of the cottonwood; a coyote slipped
Along the snowy ridge; a camp dog's bark

Shattered the frozen hush; the scintillant dark
Drifted its sable, over.... Silent they stood
Under the starry wheel of solitude.
Frost bit the bone....

Jeff muttered: "Past is past;
Those times are lost long ever; I bide me here.
My word is bound; the Mysteries have cast
My days in the mountain lands; so will I steer
My trail by yon self stars.... A-many a year
Has fled, and a-many will fly afore I go
Again Missoura way: it is better so!"

The chains of ice were broken; the winter fled
In swift spate to dark rivers; emerald haze
Burned on the willow twigs; the wild fowl sped
To the tundras of the north. Men went their ways
To the call of the beaver trails. So were the days
Busy with the take of fur; the packs grew fat
With harvest.
Edging southward toward the Platte,
Jeff trapped the thawing streams. April and May
Saw them pilfer Gray Owl and the creeks
That feed the Popo Agie; and mid-June lay
Golden on the hills below the peaks
Of the Windy Mountains, before they reached the breaks
Of the Sweetwater. June made end, and July came,
A wind of burning and a whip of flame
Above the plains of sage.
One dusk the gaze
Of men was gladdened by the sight of herds:
Buffalo massed in the valley flats, at graze,
Lazily moving. Markhead howled quick words:
"Meat's arunning! Here goes for meat!" Wild birds

Startled at his cry. His gun sped death
To a fatted cow. "Half froze for hump ribs! Faith,
This child feels like chawing!"
Camp was pitched;
The fatlings flayed and spitted. Savor rose
Of incense from the coals; moist palates twitched
To the impinging odor. Bandying jocose
Chat, men turned the spits, while the gibbose
Moon leered with half-shut eye. The feast was spread:
"She's on the prairie, lads!" Kit Carson said.

"Painter can't shine with this, now; no sirree!"
Joe Meek spoke from a store of wisdom. "Wagh!
Or why were buffaler made?" All could agree
With the oracle. Prime doings! Carson's squaw
Set a heart stew at his elbow. "This child's craw
Are stuffed aplenty!" Then tales went round: the old
Marvels of men and beasts and Spanish gold.

The moon dipped drowsily into the west
Before the feasting ended, and men crept
To the robes of slumber. Dawn grayed in the east
Above a bivouac, where it seemed men slept
The sleep of death. . . . A coyote nosed the offal, thief
adept
To plunder. A dog yapped. . . . Jeff rose and eyed
The morningshine. "Lave! Turn out!" he cried.

All day and a week of days the brigade drifted
North by east as the land lay. Morning bloomed
Above them on the Elkhorn: Joe Meek lifted
His mustang to a slope. Darkly he loomed
On the edge of sky, turned swiftly; hard hooves
boomed

On the turf. He joined the caravan with a tale
To vex the ears: "Shians! I seen their trail!"

Cautiously they moved, scouts in the van:
Noon stared upon them with malignant fire.
"Wagh!" Meek grumbled. "Luck's agin us, man!
Here we be full pack, dang!" Bridled ire
Burst forth, "And we stand to lose 'em, hoss and hire!
I claim we'd better tail for Laramie
Afore we're jumped. I do so, Jeff, hark'ee!"

"Happen you're right," Jeff mused. . . .
Late afternoon
Saw scouts at stand upon a bluff that rose
Above the Platte . . . a silent age. Jeff Boone
Prodded the caravan: impatient blows
Urged on the mules. Soon they were crowded close
Upon the brink of air: the valley lay
A level floor stretched to the edge of day.

Out of the eastern vast a shadow crawled,
A serpent of darkness into the alien land:
The long light flashed on its scales; light fled appalled
From the burn of its baleful eyes: along the sand,
A dragon from a fairy tale, it crept. Kit Carson's hand
Arched his gaze: "Wagons, by hoss and beaver!
Hurraw for conestoga!" On it came by the river.

"Look yan!" Old Killbuck cried. Down from the
north,
Weird in the slanting sun: what python this
Creeping to combat? "Injuns, wagh!" spit forth
Markhead, "or my old Betsy-gun she'll miss
P'int-blank turkey!" Jeff's horse pawed the swarth
With impatient feet. Kit cried to the watching band:
"They're after the wagon train."

Hooves spurted sand
As the running horses took the perilous slope.
Five miles of hummocky breaks and a creek to cross!
Beyond, beleaguered pilgrims lost to hope,
Death on the flying hour, death on the toss
Of a burning lance. . . . "Hell's broke loose, Old Hoss!
As pretty a scrimmage, now, as I've ever knowed.
Ride 'em, trappers, wagh!"
The trappers rode.

OREGON TRAIL

Turn out! the long call rang on the prairie air;
The camp was a flurry of tumult in a trice:
Bullocks lowed, the mule teams brayed, the blare
Of a trumpet cried the daybreak. Against still skies
Graying with dawn, smoke spiraled. Children's cries
Whimpered from the tents; mothers scolded; men
Shouted; the young lads whooped. . . . New day began.

Catch up! the bull beasts came to the galling yoke;
The mule teams fought the traces; teamsters swore.
The white tilts flamed to gold as the slow sun broke
Above the prairie rim. *All set!* Before
Them stretched the unknown land: the bright sky bore
A mystic light. . . . Too late now for regret!
Wheels on the long trail waited the word. *All set!*

Stretch out! the bull whips cracked with the shock of
guns;
The teams surged to the collars; the white dust rose
From hoof and rolling wheel, coiled in the sun's
First rays; the trappings glinted. Voyaging crows
Cawed question from the blue; the tethered cows
Bawled from the tailgate. Toward the prairie crest
The wagons lurched. "Gee-up Buck, Nig, get West!"

"Cheer up, brothers, as we go
Over the prairies, westward ho!
Where antelope and buffalo
Furnish the fare.

"Then o'er the plains in legions, boys;
Fair Freedom's Star
Points to the sunset regions, boys:
Ha! Ha-ha! Ha! Ha!

"When we've wood and meadowland
Won with our toil,
We'll reign like kings in fairyland,
Lords of the soil.

"Cheer up, brothers, as we go
Over the mountains, westward ho!
Where the deer and buffalo
Furnish the fare.

"Then guide your oxen steady, boys,
To Oregon afar;
Hold your rifles ready, boys:
Ha! Ha-ha! Ha! Ha!"

Margaret Byrne rode out toward a hill of dream
With Chloe Boone, under the morning light.
Around them the wild larks sang; beyond the stream
Low sand hills shimmered with the burnished bright
Gleaming of copper. Northward the billowing white
Rain-sterile clouds hovered against the blue;
Over the buffalo herds a far dust grew.

Chloe pursed her lips to the song of the lark;
Margaret laughed derision: "You're a feisty piece;
It's time you were getting wed," she mocked. The dark
Boone eyes flashed. A mischief of caprice
Danced on Margaret's tongue. "Hap one of these
Train boys might squire you, now; say, Robbie Bryan;
He'd give ye to do, I'd wager, he's such a shy one."

"Don't joke on't," Chloe said. "Love's everything!"
Margaret's eyes dimmed with the old despair.
"I've only known one love," she said. "One king
In the country of my heart; all others there
Are slaves to that memory. . . ."
A trumpet flare
Shrilled from the crawling train. Chloe pouted: "Sho!
They're calling us to the wagons . . . we'd better go!"

Downward they raced in a shower of flying shale.
A lofty tower of cloud loomed on the west;
Sharp tongues of lightning flickered; a rising gale
Bent the cottonwoods by the Platte. Dark purple
crest,
Saffron and opal green, brief Everest
Against the sky, the cloud! And out of it came
The bruit of mighty wheels and whips of flame.

The riders reached the train with the lashing storm:
Rain poured a deluge on the thirsty earth.
Corral! the wagons wheeled to the hoarse alarm;
Loose stock was driven in. Gargantuan mirth
Rumbled from the sky. Fiercely from birth
To death the torrent raged. . . . The sun came back.
Stretch out! the wagons rolled on the westward track.

Followed days of wind and a blowing dust.
The willows crouched in the blast. Dust stung the eyes;
Dust in the teeth of the wind! Unceasing thrust
Of wind on the wagon tilts! With running cries
The marmots fled to their holes. The lowery skies
Smoked with the hurrying sand. Dust was a sin
To the hussif in the tent—but the dust came in.

West, still west, men urged the weary teams;
The oxen plodded, drivers bent to the blast
Of bitter wind; swart women, lost to dreams,
Stared toward the unknown country beyond the last
And bleak horizon: empty space and a vast
Aching burn of brass. . . . A dry wash crossed
The trail; a wagon lurched, split axle, tossed
Its lade to the sprawl of sand.

Tired trainmen cursed
Their luck, then toiled to right the tumbled van
And mend the hurt. Vexed children cried, athirst.
Dogs panted in the smother; once and again
Forlorn fagged women chid delay. The plain
Smoldered to the scorch of sun: God, for a drink!
Parched and burned men labored on hell's brink.

The fireball seared its way across the blue.
Under the wagon the tinkering trainmen fumbled
At the broken axle: with splitted wedge and clew
They braced the shattered shaft. The hot wind
bumbled
Like bees among the tilts. The teamsters grumbled
At the quirk of fate. . . . At length the mend was set;
Whips cracked; men cried: "Get West, there! Gee-up,
Bet!"

Mules surged to sweaty collars, bulls took the yoke;
Chains clanked; the slow wheels groaned; dogs ran
with shrill
Barks, nipping at the bindweed blowing. A baby woke
And fretted in a van. A shining rill
Of song poured from a sky-hid lark; the smell
Of wild rose drifted from a prairie slough.
"Hy-up there, lads, get West: we're going through!"

With the tag end of day a rider came
Out of the sunset, a lone and woeful man.
His clothes were a filth of rags, his horse was lame,
His pack-mule gaunt as misery; before him ran
A gangling hound, blear-eyed. Out of the ken
Of years, it seemed to them, the rider fled,
A fugitive from the country of the dead.

Matt Byrne spoke him fair: "Wagh! light and set!"
The stranger eyed askance the weary train,
Then quavered riddle words: "We are well met,
My friends. I have come to bring you warning; deign
To heed my words. Turn back! This is hell's plain;
The devil's imps are out. Hear what I tell:
Here is the gate of wrath, the door of hell!"

The travelers stared astonished: "Our way lies West!"
Matt Byrne said: "What sort of man are you?"
"One out of bedlam, sir, whom death has passed
By a hair's scant breadth. Sir, as I live, scarce two
Three days agone the Old One hent me, true
As truth, with all his hell imps, by the way:
Shians, they are named of men, I have heard say.

"I was sent forth of God to bear his Word
To the children of the wild; but Satan's men
Imprisoned me before I'd scarcely stirred
A day's ride from Fort Laramie. Steeped in sin
They came, a bloody clan, the kith and kin
Of Beelzebub, and bound me. At last I made
Escape, by God's good grace. Sir, I have prayed
His help in my dark hour and he has heard."

Matt, pityingly, asked: "How long is it since you ate?"
"I have forgotten: a day, a week, oh, long ago!"
"*Corral!*" Matt gave the word: the grimy spate
Of schooners flowed full circle. The stranger sat
His beast in silence, till Matt shouted: "Ho!
Come to the wagon." Margaret brought him food.
The stranger ate and blessed them before God.

Margaret said: "I once knew one who came
To this wild land long ever ago. He died,
So I've heard tell; the Indians killed him." Flame
Of sorrow brimmed her eyes. The stranger sighed.
"Perhaps he is not dead: men may have lied
In the report. I feel he may be near:
I am one who senses truth of such things, here."
His hand lay on his heart.

Margaret wept
To hear him say so. Matt Byrne broke the spell.
"The Shians are running, say you?" The old fear crept
To the stranger's face: "Or devils fresh from hell!"
He cried. Then Matt: "They're fearsome, I've heard
tell,
And bloody creatures." "You may say so, sir!"
The camp fell silent; a lone cricket's chirr
Made fragile song.

The night drew over: cool
The wind blew from the swales; the nighthawks
zoomed
Above the ghostly tents; frogs, from a pool
Of marsh flow, drummed insistent; starflowers bloomed
In the plain that was the sky; moon shadows loomed
Along the east, whiting the prairie sod.
The stranger murmured low: "Abide in God!"

With dawn the camp was up, the wagons hitched.
The word was: "March! Stretch out! Buck, Nig, get
West!"
Gaunt on his piebald, where the camp was pitched,
His rucksack filled again, his hound at rest
In the scurf of sand, the stranger watched the dust
Of hoof and wheel dwine slowly on the sky.
A coyote yapped: he heard a curlew cry.

West! Get West! Day upon endless day
The wagons rumbled: by boggy acre; sand;
Stone stretch and cactus flat; hills hedged with gray
Sage and the spiny pear; by Mad Creek, band
Of quag to mire the wheels; a broken land
Of bluffs and shale slides; far off the snowy crest
Of the Shining Mountains: "Gee-up there, lads, get
West!"

"Indians! . . Indians! . . Corral! . . Corral!" the cry
Shattered the somnolent drowse of afternoon.
"Shians, damn my eyes!" Against the sky,
Suddenly they were there; the medicine rune
Of death upon their lips; a wolf-wild tune
To quell the hearts of men. The wagons wheeled
To the circle of defense; the low sun reeled.

Dogs dithered challenge. The Shians paused, and one
Rode forward with raised hand in sign of peace.
Matt strode to parley. "Goods on the prairie: gun,
Red cloth, blanket; toll for passage. These
Are Shian lands. Bad medicine: white man run
Elk away, scare buffalo! Long Knife pay
Indian, or he go back the sunrise way!"

Jonathan Colby swore: "By God, Matt, tell
The damn red niggers we'll not give a rag
To pass. This country's ourn. They can go to hell!
This land is U. S. A. The American flag
Flies here the same as t'other side Missou'.
They can't come that on white men. Let 'em brag,
The goddamn murderers. Tell 'em we're coming
through!"

Rifle guns stared defiance from forted wheels;
Knives and axes gleamed bright menace. Then
Matt said: "Our way lies West! Get out!" Hard heels
Drummed on the smoking prairie. The embattled train
Waited the onslaught: resolute fighting men,
Stronghearts on the danger trail.
Swift as a breath
The Shians circled in a flying ring of death.

Arrows flew in a feathered rain; long rifles spoke
Once and again; hot leaden balls sped home
To the house of flesh. Wolfish the death cries woke
Mad echoes in the bluffs. White cruddled foam
Flecked from the ponies' mouths. A spurt of loam
Leaped as an arrow glanced on a tuft of sod
Carrying death to the heart of Ezra Todd.

Three times the riders circled; three times three
Shrieking warriors fell to the bite of dust.
Elizabeth Linkhorn wailed, her heart adree
For the little one slain at her breast. Jeb Linkhorn,
lust
Of hate in his eyes, steadied his rifle, thrust
From a wagon wheel; the long tube blazed. With grim
Knife blade he notched the stock. Again the slim
Steel flamed: another coup!

The Shians bought
Babe Linkhorn's life with a dozen warriors: Jeb
Was a stark machine of vengeance. His gun grew hot
With the spewing of his hate: and still the tab
On his gunstock grew. He felt the burning stab
Of an arrow in his arm; his lips writhed back;
He fired; a Shian toppled to the crack.

The slow sun sinking nightward threw long light
On the battle plain; and still the Shians rode
In a widening circle, waiting the fall of night
For the final charge. Thirst was a stinging goad
In the flesh of men; death and its fear, was a load
To bow the hearts of women; children wailed.
Behind the barricades hope dwined and failed.

Dusk rose like a mist from the earth. The keening cry
Of wolf-men broke from the shadows, then quiet came
To drown the world in terror. Moon-murky sky
Glowered a secret menace. Women, the name
Of God on the lips, lay tense. Men waited. Flame
Touched powder, the silence exploded with the sound
Of death whoops in the dusk. Out of the ground
Arrows arched to the kill.

"Oh, God's love!" moaned
A stricken voice: "Oh, give me water!" "Damn!
Fire low! There in the grass! Fire low!" intoned
Matt Byrne, automaton. "Let 'em have it! Slam
'Em! Keep 'em back!" Onward the shadows came
Implacable, bringing death. Jeb hurled a shot:
"You're not going to take these wagons; by God,
you're not!"

Suddenly out of the night new rumor rose.
"Ride 'em trapper! Green River: give 'em hell!
Give the niggers beaver!" Startled foes
Sprang from the grass like partridges, ran pell-mell
To the mount of mustangs. Rifle crash and the yell
Of mountain men: "How-wagh! we're on our spree;
Red skin can't shine here this jamboree!"

THE SHADOW OF A DREAM

Beyond the battle campfires starred the night,
Jeff searched out the wagon master. . . . His heart went
chill
As to whet of frost, his weathered face blanched white
At the sound of a voice remembered sweet with the
trill
Of love. . . . From a van a girl climbed to the thill
And stood before him. She looked into his eyes:
Fear mingled with joy there, and a tranced surprise.

Love out of death as a ghost came walking
From the windy country of the stars!
Out of the shadow of sunset stalking,
Love out of death, as a ghost came walking. . . .
Touch me with your hands. . . . O wild dream
mocking!
O love, O death, and forgotten wars!
Love out of death as a ghost came walking
From the windy country of the stars!

Let me not wake if this be dreaming,
Lest dream be lost when the dreamer wake!
What is this light as a white star gleaming?
Let me not wake if this be dreaming!
Out of this dusk, what bright star beaming,
Mirrors the dark of my heart's still lake?
Let me not wake if this be dreaming,
Lest dream be lost when the dreamer wake!

Joy on the lips is a dancing laughter:
Love, his love is a star in my heart!
Darkness is lost, now; dawn comes after . . .
Joy on the lips is a dancing laughter;
The wild lark sings against heaven's rafter.
Shall love's frail ghost with the dawn depart?
Joy on the lips is a dancing laughter . . .
Lo! he comes as a star in my heart!

"You!" she cried, "Jeff Boone?" Love's ancient plea
Welled in her heart. Oblivious of the world
And all its devious ways, long agony
Forgot, her lips drank love. Old sorrow whirled
To the abyss of unremembrance: beauty hurled
Like an arrow against her breast. . . . These only two
Were of the earth: the moments dripped like dew.

A paunch-shot Shian crawled into a clump
Of crab thorn by the creek. A trapper passed
A spear's length off, scalp-hunting; returned to camp.
Malevolent the warrior crouched, and with the last
Upsurge of dying power he loosed a shaft
Toward the forted wagons: stark he fell,
The cry of death on his mouth, death's triumph yell.

The flying arrow arched athwart the night.
Jeff heard the venomed hiss as the missile sang
Its song of death: Margaret shivered to its flight. . . .
Sudden a strangled cry of anguish rang
From the lips his lips had kissed, as the flinty fang
Crunched in the tender flesh. . . . O death's swift dart!
O stone dust stained with the beauty of love's heart!

The moon leered from the east with an evil burning;
An owl mourned by the Platte: "Hoo-oo! Hoo-oo!"

Singing Star came from the shadows, her dark eyes
yearning
To Jeff with a piteous fire. The nightwind blew
Along the prairie with faint voice of sighing. "You,
Jeff Boone," Margaret cried, "Jeff Boone," she said,
"I love you and I am dying!" Jeff bent his head.

"They told me you were dead but my heart said, no!
My heart would not believe: but my ears believed
The tales," she sighed. "Oh, the years were a dusty row
Of cannikins on a shelf, meal-empty; lived
Somehow. Many a lee-long day I've strived
Toward laughter. . . . Was I unhappy? I forget. . . .
Not I . . . some other girl . . . not Margaret!

"I used to know a girl whose heart was lone:
It was long ever ago in another land:
And she is dead. . . . It never was I, Jeff Boone;
I was a-never unhappy!" She lifted her hand:
The mist of death spread over the trampled sand.
"Once long ago," she whispered, "a leesome bird
Sang in a thorn," Jeff harked to the low-breathed word,

"A little redbird sang, and it was spring. . . .
Let me touch your face, Jeff Boone: you loved me
then!
Hold me. . . . My eyes can't see you. . . . 'Pears
everything
Is dark: the fine-pretty world. . . . O redbird, sing
In the thornberry tree. . . . 'Tis lovely to hear again
The redbird sing in the sunfall. . . . Outen the night
The moon it comes acreeping, a dowie white
And wanlit face in the eve-gloam. . . .
He is not dead . . .

I have seen his face: his face is the evening star:
Starlight, star bright, first star . . . no! no! They said
The Indians killed him: in the deserts: long and afar
From my love and my arms to hold him. . . . Redbird,
red
As his blood on the lonely sand: pretty-heart, bring
Him home to my arms of love: little redbird, sing!

"O lorn and lonely heart, let you forget!
Forget him and all his lovesome words. . . . The night
Is afeared. . . . There was a girl . . . called Margaret . . .
In love with a lad . . . Jeff Boone . . . Jeff Boone!" The
light
Died in her as a candle snuffed, the white
Of her throat was snow in the winter's moon . . .
Jeff stood
Staring as one in a dream-lost solitude,
Then laid her lonely on the bed of earth.
She slumbered, stilled to the music that is this living,
Her heart mute clay, her pale lips reft of mirth.
The fire that was her hair seemed a bright flame
striving
To kindle the darkened breast, the soft, love-giving
Lips, ice-chill, that never a love may warm!
Dust unto dust: earth, take her to your arm!

As a holy fire spilled from the sun, as a light
Whelmed in the blank mid-dark, on earth she lies:
All that she hoped and dreamed, fallen. As a white
Vessel shattered, her body; the pools of her eyes
Under the glaze of frost; gone silent there
The lilt of her song-sweet laughter, faded on air.

She whose mouth was a flower to the wind's cool kiss,
Whose heart was an altar burning with April fire,
The gold-bright fire of love; now is she this:
Dust and the going of dust; life's quick desire
Stolen from the husk of her breast. Does dream forsake
her?
Give her to the keep of stars! let the earth take her!

Now is she winged of the wind and melled with the
mountains;
Her loveliness flown forever on the mountainy wind
And the wind of storm; she is one with the storm's
white fountain,
The murmurous watersilver; one with the thinned
Blue light of the wheeling moon, and the moonflower
blowing;
One with the valley mist and the dark rains going.

Let the earth rest on her heart, the shadow of stone
Lie on her heart like love, heavy as love:
Under the passing of suns, let the white bone
Of her beauty find rest, let her rest: wildfire above
Burning; lulled by the owl and its goblin mirth;
One with the perilous night, the inviolable earth.

Was this a dream? Or was life thus and so?
Jeff gazed upon her there on the moonlit sand:
The frail white mystery of her; as the stilled flow
Of music muted at dusk in a lonely land.
A ghostflower in the night, her lifeless hand
Shone in a tuft of grama—pale hand that held
His heart in its steely clutch. . . .
As if death-spelled,
He wrested his eyes from that loveliness lost to the
world,

The sunbright loveliness his heart had shunned
In an old land long ago; spilled sunlight whirled
To the maw of engulfing night. He stood, heart-
stunned,
Snared in a valley of shadows, a depth unsunned . . .
And he saw as a ghost that other standing there,
Singing Star, under the dark.

The campfire's flare
Revealed her as the shadow of a dream
Dreamed on another star: inscrutable eyes
Gazed into his, unquestioning the scheme
Of days as lived by the pale ones, dark surmise
In her alien heart quiescent. . . . What auguries
Were hid in the deep cavern of her breast?
Life on the savage hour! His eyes yearned west.

And the mountains were as walls to fend his lodge
Against death's flying spear; the winds a-roam
From the high white reaches murmured in the sedge;
And the winds were eager songs to call him home.
A shining star slipped from the purple dome
Of sky and poised on a mesa of no name:
It was his torch, it was his lodge fire's flame.

And the stars paled in that hour and the new day came!

He saw the sun rise up from underground,
And the mist in the long sloughs cast its silver net,
And the mist coiled in his heart, cold as regret. . . .
Turn out! he heard the call, a trumpet sound
Shrilling the ancient dream. *Catch up! All set!*
The sun was a haze of gold on the mountain's crest. . . .
He heard the long cry roll: *Stretch out! Get West!*

SON OF THE MOUNTAINS

Son of the Mountains: go
Your ways on the trail of fur.
If woman grieve or woman die,
Forget. Life is a heart-keen cry:
Let you not dream of her!

I saw a ghost go riding
When dusk was pale and thinned;
I heard a coyote chiding
Tall shadows on the wind;
I saw the shades of bison,
King Bison in the van;
I heard sweet mule bells chiming . . .
Mountain Man!

Son of the Mountains: now
Give your feet to the trail:
Beauty of life is a thing to learn;
Love is a fire that dreams outburn;
A glad, a sorry tale.

I saw a ghost go riding,
I heard his laughter ring
Like bells among the stony screes;
I heard a blackbird sing;
The blue hawks spiraled over
Marmots, afeared, that ran
To the cover of sage . . . and a silver lark . . .
Mountain Man!

Son of the Mountains: Lo!
See where the shadows creep
Above white bleaching bones in the sand. . . .
Peace, now: and dream, in a lonely land,
And quiet sleep.

I saw a ghost go riding
Under the great shield moon;
I heard a dark one singing,
Behind him, her cradle croon.
A gray owl spoke: "Tuwhoo-oo!"
The silver moonpath ran
To her lodge place under the velvet night . . .
Mountain Man!

Son of the Mountains: Ho!
I see your lodge flame glow
To the spark of lost love's ancient fire,
To the beauty of song and new desire . . .
Hetchetu aloh!

DATE DUE

JAN 5 1954

JUL. 1 2 1983

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